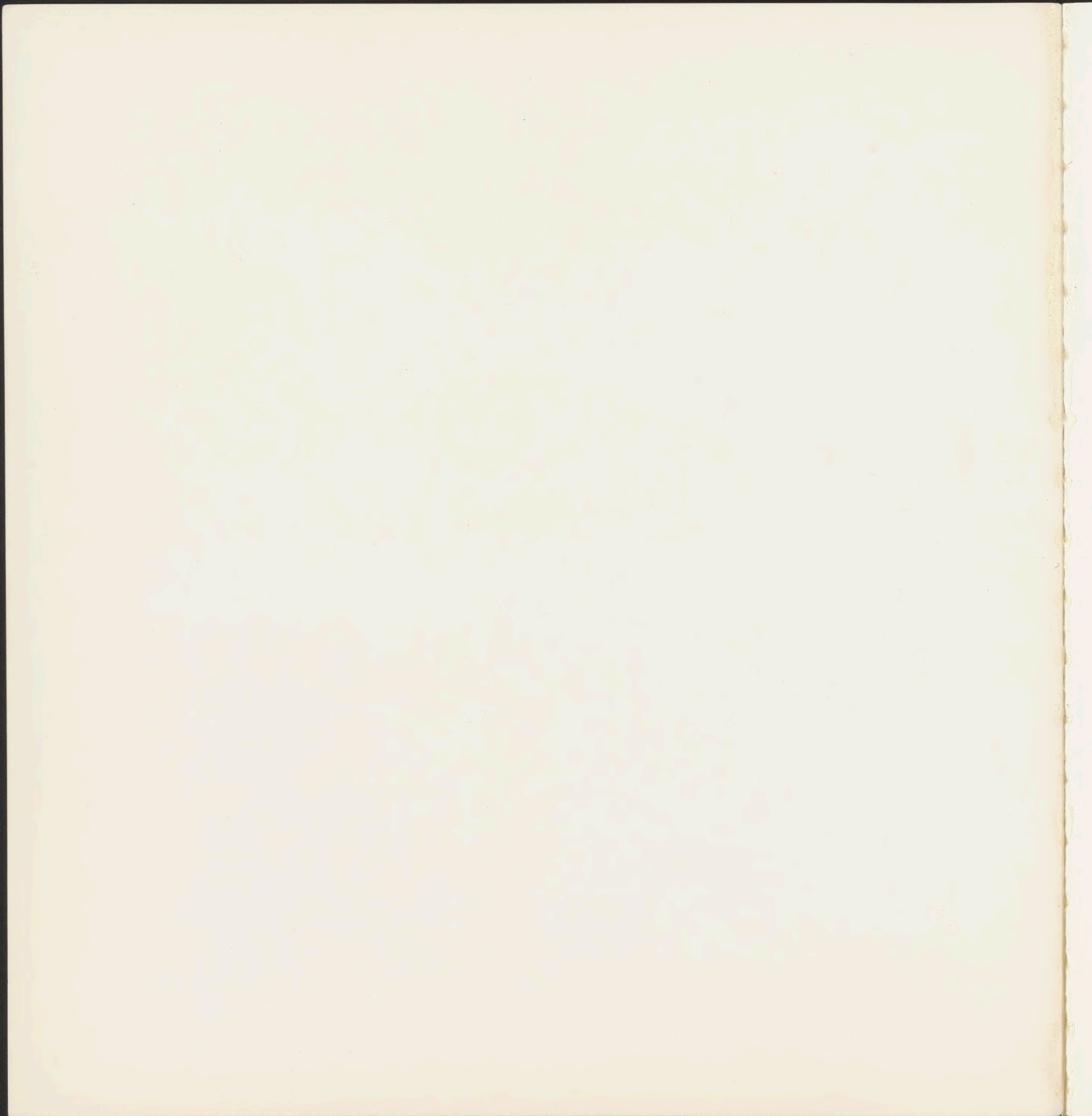
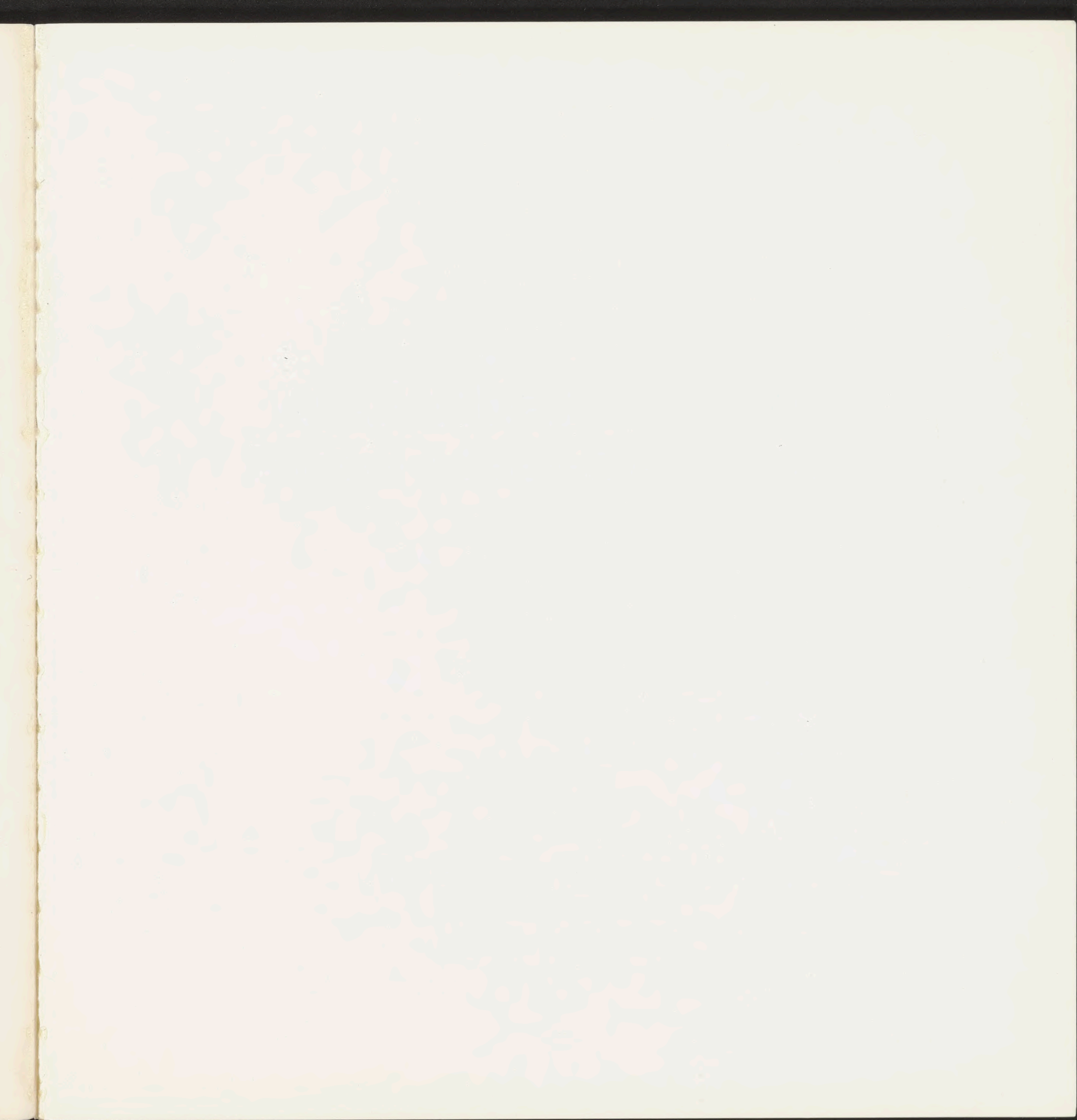


ALEXANDER LIBERMAN





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JAMES PILGRIM
Curator of American Art

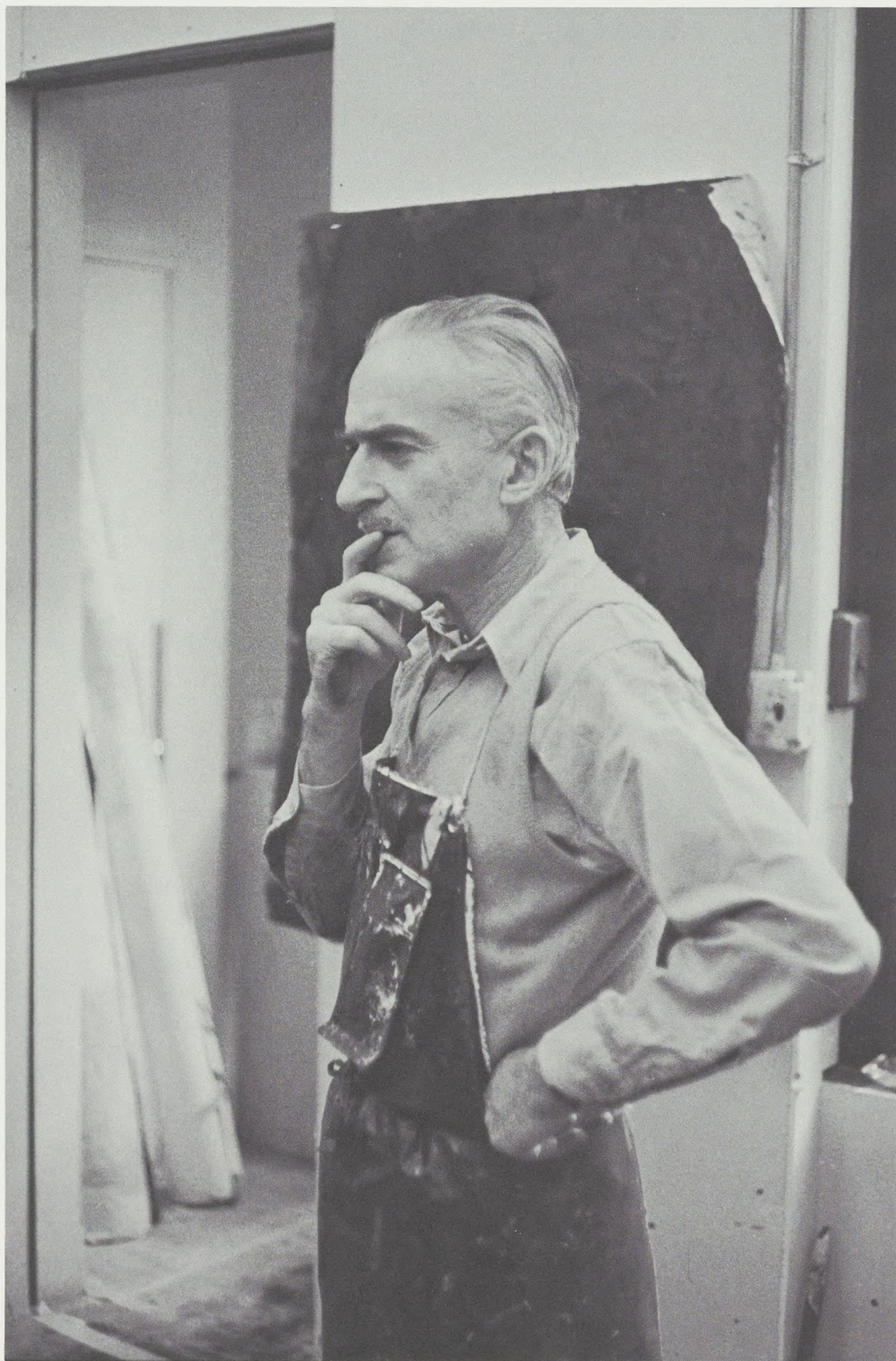
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ALEXANDER LIBERMAN

INTRODUCTION

Although Alexander Liberman has exhibited regularly since 1960, this exhibition at The Corcoran Gallery of Art affords the first opportunity to view the full range of his painting and sculpture. One is immediately struck by the sheer volume, the range of activity, and the inventiveness of the work; it is only somewhat later that one comes to a sense of the harmony and consistency that unifies it. Liberman's extraordinary range of activity has been commented upon frequently, most often in the context of his capacity to express himself in several modes or styles, for example hard edge, gestural, minimal. One response on the part of critics, perhaps the result of the prevalence of the one-artist/one-image phenomenon in American art of the '50s and '60s, has been to mistake Liberman's range of activity for a facility, a lack of content. The works in this exhibition clearly show that this is not the case. There is quality, consistency and integrity, as well as a unique and personal imprint evident throughout Liberman's work.

There are several themes that appear to be constant in his art. While this discussion deals specifically with the paintings, much that is said applies to his work in general (Walter Hopps and Liberman discuss the sculpture in the interview which follows). Liberman is always in some way involved with meaning, whether in the secrets of system and chance, or in the process of perception, or the mystery of cycles, rhythms, and forms. There are also basic images or shapes—circles, arcs, and more recently triangles—that appear throughout his works. Finally, there is a unique quality of lightness, experienced as weightlessness or buoyancy, present in most of his works.

A preoccupation with the circle is apparent in most of Liberman's work. He arrived at the image in his circle paintings of 1950—the earliest works included in the exhibition—as a logical outgrowth of his paintings of the late 1940s. His paintings of 1947-49, primarily landscapes, show an increasing flatness—he had long been disenchanted with the restrictions of Cubist space and composition—as well as a tendency toward overall pattern. By the fall of 1949 there was no recognizable image, only an overall pattern of short, thick juxtaposed brushstrokes. He next began to enlarge, to blow up, small sections of these paintings, constantly reducing the number of elements, until they resembled geometric shapes, particularly circles. The next step, in the summer of 1950, was a canvas in which a large blue circle and a smaller white circle were painted freehand on a red ground.

Dissatisfaction with the irregularity of the freely drawn circles led him to the compass drawn circles and smooth enamel surface of *ONE CIRCLE*, 1950 (no. 1). The stringent means and stark image of this painting was remarkable for its time. Indeed, Liberman's first exhibited work, *TWO CIRCLES*, 1950 (no. 2) shown in the Guggenheim Museum's "Younger American Painters" exhibition of 1954, appeared startling, perhaps incomprehensible, in the context of New York School painting of the early 1950s. This painting is comprised simply of two circles smoothly painted in glossy black enamel floating on a masonite panel whose surface was sprayed with refrigerator enamel. This surface appears anonymous, seeming to eschew any



43. FROM GREY TO GREY, 1963

sense of personal expression, and masking any glimpse of the painting's origins in the exploration of alternatives to Cubist space that it shares with other works of the New York School.

While the circle image evolved naturally in Liberman's work, it was also the product of careful thought. In an unpublished essay of 1950, "Thoughts on Art," he first developed the idea of an "inner image structure." He says that painting "should be an object of meditation," that it should link the insight of the artist with the thought process of the spectator, and that in this "semi-telepathic communication between the creative artist and the spectator lies the future direction and mystery of art." Assuming the existence of universal "pre-built images" and "pre-built rhythms" the task of the artist is to look inside himself to discover universal forms and shapes. These should have no immediate associations and should be pure, "so that the painting is directed to new and unexplored areas of the brain." Liberman concludes: "To reach these regions it seems advisable to start with the most easily absorbable form, a circle or sphere, the most logical basic form perception unit."

Thus the inner image, the circle, is to convey meaning. In the first works this tends to be literal as in the concept of inequality expressed in *WHITE DOMINANT*, 1952 (no. 11). He later uses the circle to explore the perception of rhythm and movement, as in *ROTATING*, 1955-56 (no. 19) and chance, as in *SIX HUNDRED AND THIRTY-NINE*, 1959 (no. 23). In the 1960s the meanings become more symbolic. A sense of cosmic mystery is conveyed by the giant arcs in *THE GREAT MYSTERIES I*, 1962 (no. 34), or in the idea of resurrection implied by the feeling of levitation in his recent paintings.

There is a lightness, or more precisely a suspension of weight, in Liberman's paintings of the 1950s. This is partially the result of the lightness of the painting itself—most were painted on thin masonite or aluminum panels set out from the wall so that they seemed to float—and partially the result of the thin reflecting enamel surfaces, but it is mainly the result of the surface image. That is, one does not experience the painting itself as weightless so much as one perceives that the images on the surface are not affected by the gravity field of the spectator. Something of a sense of weightlessness is inherent in the circle, and when circles are placed within circles or juxtaposed to circles, as in *ROTATING*, 1955-56 (no. 19) a gravitational pull between them is established. Just as one does not sense mass when imagining or picturing planets in the solar system, one cannot think of weight in these circles. They are detached from us, they do not obey the laws of gravity that we experience.

Liberman's use of juxtaposed color circles and afterimages, which creates the illusion of movement and instability, adds to the sense of weightlessness. For example, in *EXCHANGE*, 1952 (no. 16), a floating balance is achieved as the eye moves between the larger blue and yellow circles and the smaller yellow and blue circles, while in *CONTINUOUS ON RED*, 1960 (no. 26), the eye drifts among the after-images seeming to set the whole surface adrift.

The weightlessness of these paintings is apparent in all of the means at Liberman's command, yet it is more understood than felt. That is, although the painting itself seems suspended, the main experience of weightlessness takes place in the specta-

tor's mind through his recognition of the particular gravity of the circles and through the movement or balance transmitted by his eye. The spectator perceives a suspension of weight rather than experiences a feeling of buoyancy.

There is more of a sense of mass, of the presence of the painting, in the hard edge works of 1961-62, yet here too the images seem suspended. The circles stretch from the top to the bottom edge of the canvas while gigantic arcs (sections of circles) sweep across the picture plane, as in *OMEGA XV*, 1961 (no. 32). There is the feeling that both image and field continue beyond the picture edge. This is particularly true of *OMICRON II*, 1961 (no. 33) where one imagines two giant black circles crossing the circular canvas. Like the earlier paintings these circles exist in their own field of gravity, but unlike them the spectator is drawn into the mystery of their touching.

Liberman's paintings of 1963-64 seem to break the sense of weightlessness, perhaps because of his sudden involvement with the expressive aspects of paint. The circle and arc images are still present and to a degree function as they did in the hard edge paintings, but their ragged edges and asymmetry tend to confine them to the canvas. In *RAW END*, 1963 (no. 45) the splashes, drips, splatters, the overlaid washes of color, give the painting a sense of physicality that belies the lightness of the images.

In Liberman's paintings of the past five years there is an increasing sense of levitation that results from his control of the expressive qualities of color and shape. In many of the black paintings of 1965-66, for example *ASCENSION*, 1966 (no. 54), he leaves an uneven band of raw canvas across the bottom of the painting which seems to push the black upward. Frequently there is an elliptical shape, containing muted colors, entering from the top; in *ASCENSION* the shape becomes more angular, approaching a triangle, and creates an effect of color rising. This effect is more apparent in *ON HIGH*, 1967 (no. 58) where arc-shaped areas of raw canvas press into the painting from both sides, seeming to push the color bands to the top of the painting.

Like the circle before it, the triangle image evolved naturally in Liberman's work. It is present in all of his paintings since 1967, either as a shape rising toward the top of a rectangular canvas, as in *UP-BLUE BETWEEN VIOLET AND YELLOW*, 1968-69 (no. 66) or as the shape of the canvas itself, as in the *Vector* series. Levitation is inherent in the triangular shape. When pointed down, the triangle literally seems to ascend. In *VECTOR-YELLOW, RED HIGH*, 1969 (no. 69) the canvas itself is part of the ascent; the yellow triangle rises to the raw canvas band and pins the red band against the top of the painting.

In one of the most recent works, *GENESIS*, 1970 (no. 71) the triangle image is no longer confined to the picture surface. A yellow triangle spans the enormous rectangular canvas (10' x 30') and is surrounded by a larger white triangle shape that is completed beyond the edge of the canvas. The loosely washed grey areas at the extremities of the canvas suggest a space field (perhaps a larger triangle) through which the two triangles rise. The sense of buoyancy in this painting is overwhelming.

Lightness seems to be Liberman's personal touch; it infuses most of his paintings in the same way that an artist's "hand" is felt in drawings. It appears in the earlier paintings as a sense of suspension in the juxtaposition of circles. Following the critical juncture of the gestural paintings of 1963-64 it appears as a sense of levitation that the spectator feels in the relationship of color and shape.

Liberman's art is varied and complex. While it is essentially openended, seeking new possibilities, moods, materials, it also backtracks, reviving old approaches. Its constant aspects—the sense of lightness, the persistence of image, the multiplicity of meanings—are interwoven and act as a unifying theme. Like a fugue, the independent elements—styles or modes of expression—are harmonized as they develop from the central theme. To understand Liberman's art we must recognize its unity and enlarge our critical categories to encompass its complexity.

JAMES PILGRIM



38. FROM RED TO GREEN, 1963

NOTES FOR AN INTERVIEW WITH ALEXANDER LIBERMAN

by Thomas B. Hess

Of all the birds in the flock, Alexander Liberman is the rarest—perched apart, trim, graceful—a heron perhaps.

The others, our friends the artists of the New York School, are in sparrow-brown fighting togs or rapt in admiration of their own glorious plumage: some look hostile, others oppressed; they move at odd angles and in off-balance gestures.

Liberman on the other hand is described by trim ovals: immensely civilized, muted, quintessentially European, a part of the Europe whose culture has been distilled for over 5,000 years, from the obelisks of Egypt to the one on the Place de la Concorde.

His paintings suggest a fanatic, even ferocious character; there is chaos lurking behind the expertise of their techniques and formats, but it is hard to say exactly where Liberman's turmoil is located or how we become aware of it—just as it is difficult to visualize that the heron, weightlessly poised at the end of a twig, suddenly can turn into a fatal spear, jab at the surface of a pond and then lumber into the air, a huge frog scissored in its bill.

What energies inform his extraordinary balance? What dialectic has enabled him to synthesize so many contradictions?

To start at the beginning, with mere appearances, Liberman does not have to bother to look or act like an artist because he does not have to convince himself that he is a painter and sculptor; he has known this since the age of five. And because he always has had one goal and a single profession, he has been able to do many other things to make a living—writing, designing, photographing.

He fills an influential, full-time job in the headquarters of one of the great magazine empires. I said to him once "It must be pleasant to work with all those beautiful girls around." "Of course," he answered grinning, "why else do you think I chose *Vogue*?"

"I work so hard when I paint, use so much energy, that I'm glad to get to the magazine to relax—my Thélème," he said on another occasion.¹

How does he do it—not only the paintings and sculptures in giant scale, but long series of drawings, studies for pictures, lithographs, photograph studies for sculptures-in-progress, plus omnivorous reading, travels and a job that would cap another man's successful career?

"Like all great Russians," explains Betty Parsons, his dealer and one of his first and best supporters, "Alex has double genes—double brain, double stomach . . . double everything!"

Most artists remember being taken when very young to a museum by their parents; Liberman also recalls arranging paints on the palette of a fashionable artist who

had come to the Liberman's Moscow house to do a portrait of his mother, a reigning beauty.

Another recollection: His mother's private theater—sets by the Constructivists; their radical concepts of avant-garde experimentalism. Alex decides he will be a modern artist. Or had he already made up his mind? The answer is unclear, but when the time comes for him to choose an art school (the Libermans are now in Paris; it is the late-1920s) there is no question about it—he will attend the most advanced institution which, everybody says, is run by the Cubist André Lhote.

Another early memory: He is outside his parents' drawing-room on a train and hears his father say to his mother: “. . . yes, he is a charming boy; a pity he isn't intelligent . . .”

Liberman tells this anecdote with a gentle smile, perhaps because he obviously is so intelligent that the story itself enacts a kind of implicit triumph over a forever triumphing father; or perhaps it is because as an artist Liberman does not want to be “intelligent” any more but spontaneous and instinctive; or maybe it is a joke, a classic bit of information gathered by the world's greatest spy ring—the unseen child; or perhaps it is another example of the artist's throw-away style of confident modesty? It is one of his striking traits in an age when most modern artists grudgingly will cite one influence or, if pressed, two, usually to acknowledge debts to such non-competing ancestors as Giotto or Velasquez. Liberman on the other hand practically brings in the whole telephone book. He is loud in his admiration for Newman, Pollock and Rothko; for Kupka and Giacometti; Picasso, Matisse and Brancusi. At first I was surprised at what seemed to be a self-effacing protocol—a kind of *après vous mon chère Alphonse* gesture. Later I understood that Liberman is so confident of his identity as an artist that he can indulge in a quality rare enough among painters to be considered a vice (a vice, according to the Supreme Court, is a very rare taste)—that is, generosity.

Very well then—he is sure who he is, he is sure he is an artist, and he can relax when he looks in the mirror every morning because his main anxiety is to get back to work. Is it this self-knowledge that has given an extraordinary interior consistency to an extremely varied body of work produced over the past 35 years?

If an archeologist in the year 2070, digging through layers of enzyme detergent and plastic humus, could assemble a representative group of Liberman paintings and sculptures, but was unable to find any documentation about them, he probably would decide that either he was faced with the production of a family of artists active for several generations, or that a single artist, submitting to a series of revelations and conversions, had drastically changed his style and personality at least three, but possibly more times. Our archeologist probably would opt for the second explanation because of parallel conversion phenomena among such contemporaneous painters as Kline, Rothko, Newman, Guston, Lichtenstein, Noland, etc. Like Saul on the road to Damascus, such mid-twentieth-century Americans had “seen the light,” “heard the word,” and they emerged totally changed from the experience—one of them, like Saul, even changed his name. These artists often recalled their experience with awe—for a while everything was black, impossible,

closed-in; the idea of art became repulsive; then, suddenly came the breakthrough to a new insight, a new style, an outpouring of fresh experiences.²

Liberman, however, denies any such rupture in the development of his ideas and feels that his art grew logically, step by step, accruing mass and shifting aspects like a reef of coral evolves out of its lagoon.

The key word—and a property often evoked by the artist—is “logic” and for Liberman, dedication to the logical began when his maturity began, that is at school, in Paris, in one of those serenely French classrooms where adolescent Russian intellectuals, all fire and thunder, fall in love with classicism.

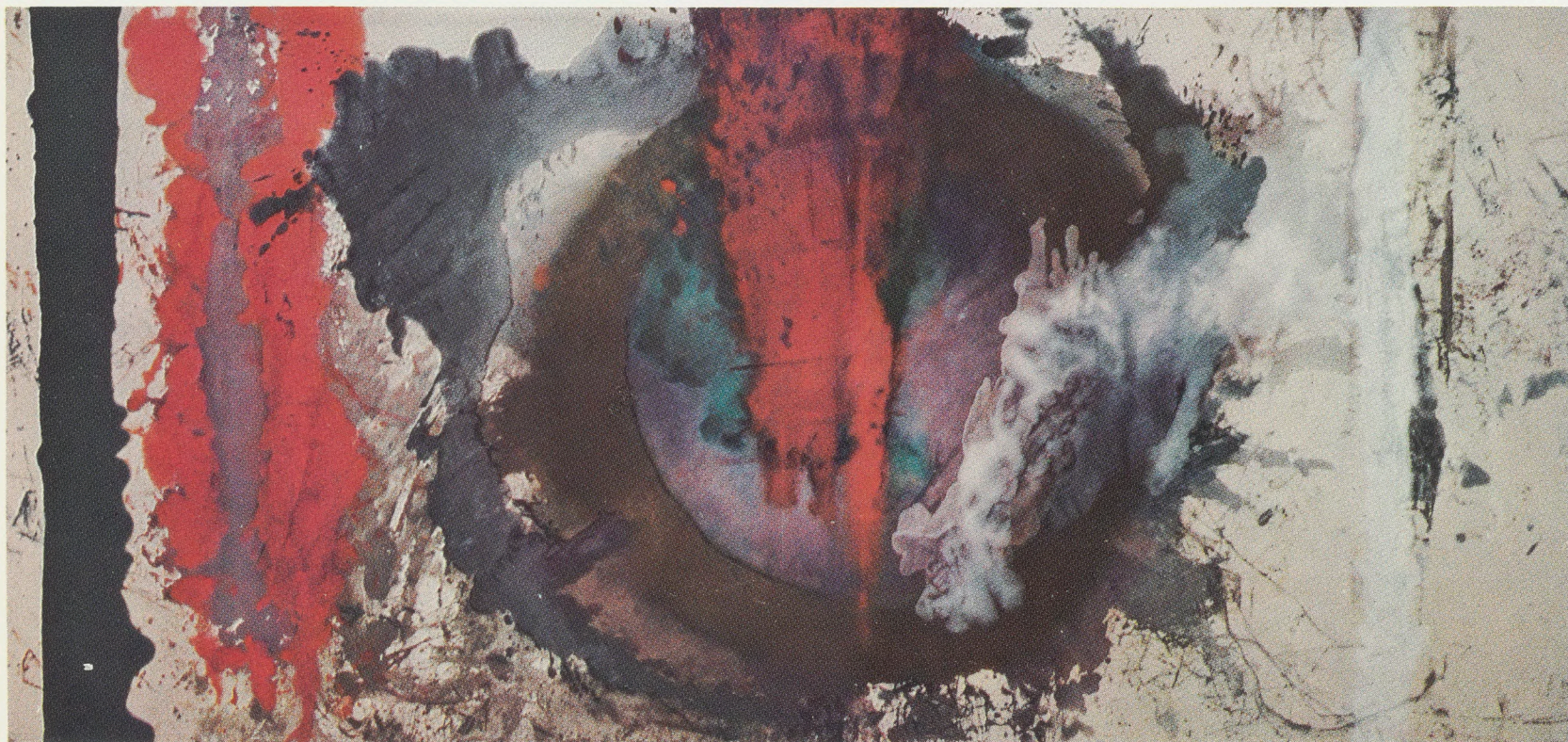
Liberman still recites with pleasure the law of classical unities which each French schoolboy must learn by heart: everything in a play (or a painting, or in any work of art) must happen in one time, in one place, in one action.³ Violence occurs off-stage, just as in many of Liberman's abstract paintings of the 1950s, the fantastic event will take place outside the painting (e.g. a “straight” line is the arc of a Great Circle and thus describes on the painting the shortest possible route from one edge of the canvas, around the world, and back into the picture from the opposite edge).

Classicism, the French are fond of telling the rest of the world, is the necessary decorum of logic, moderation and order which must be imposed on such passionate creatures as themselves—otherwise there would be nothing in Gaul but chaos and rutting. Classicism turns their forests into files of pruned trees; it scans a row of cabbages as thoughtfully as an Alexandrine.

For the modern French, classicism often seems an alibi—they use its cold mask to disguise an icy countenance; its main function has turned into thoughtless decor. But for Liberman it was and remains a basic assumption, a touchstone of his esthetic. It channels the highest possible pressure of energy through the most rigorous, intellectual, formal schema. He quotes with approval Pascal's disgust with the subjective: “*le moi est haïssable*,” and here indeed the visions of Racine and Poussin find common ground with the aspirations of Cézanne, Mondrian, Duchamp, de Kooning and many of the cooler members of the Abstract-Expressionist generation. The artist throws away the more easily accessible expressions of his personality in order to reach a deeper level where, hopefully, more universal forms may be defined. From another, more traditional, point of view it involves a censoring of the idiosyncratic to achieve a classic formulation of humane balance.

This attitude could be called the “anti-artist” sub-division of the larger anti-art movement which has characterized so much of the best painting and sculpture of the last half-century. The artist abandons—rises above—the self-indulgent pleasures of lyrical effusion in order to find something deep inside himself which will be more general, more resonant of the universal, a Truth.

While the young Alexander Liberman was becoming a fanatic classicist at school, he was getting stupendously bored by the dogmas of Cubism as propagated by the academically minded André Lhote. He was not what the French consider a good art student—that is, he couldn't draw fast. Nor was he happy with the conventions



47. FROM BLACK TO WHITE, 1964

and shortcuts which made up a large part of the instruction. But Lhote did have a strong negative influence, for Liberman developed a distaste for "structure within a format"—his own characterization of Cubism—that has lasted all his life and guided some of his most important decisions.

He left Lhote and, looking around Paris for a place to continue his training as a modern artist, decided with prophetic intelligence to work under the architect Auguste Perret—great innovator of reinforced-concrete structures, of idealist urban plans in massive scale and good all-around eccentric classicist.

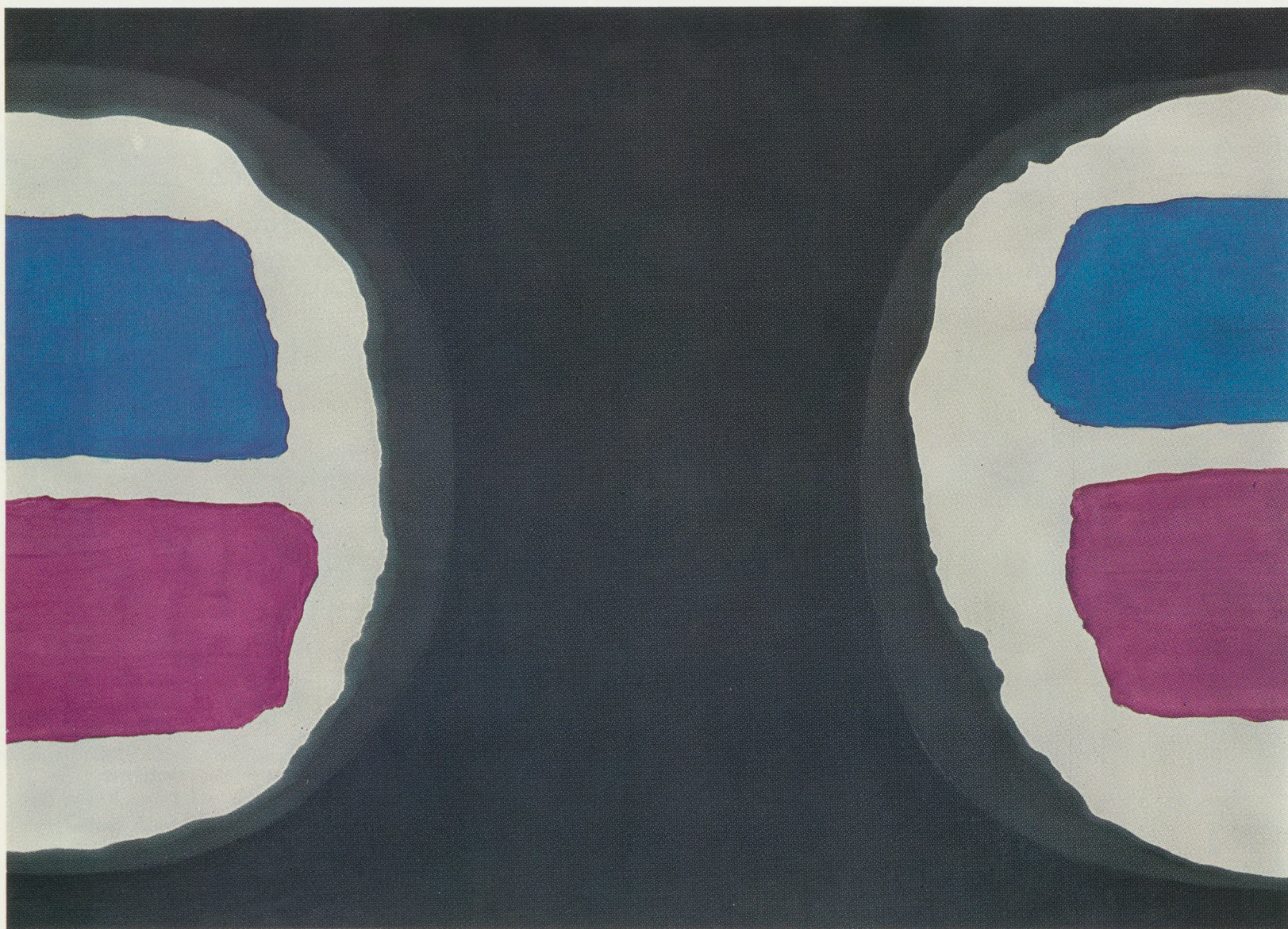
Anyone who has walked up the twenty-two stories of the "Tour Perret" in Amiens—the master's crowning achievement—realizes that the clue to his monumental vision is the relationship of the cylinder to the cube, here expressed in the taut dynamism of spiral staircases shooting like uncoiled springs between the volume of one rectangular room to that of another on the floor above. This structural fugue was elaborated, of course, some twenty years after Liberman had left Perret's atelier and some seven years before he began to investigate very similar motifs in his own huge steel sculptures; nor had Liberman any knowledge of Perret's ultimate building; but it is from such bits of coincidence that the fabric of modern art anti-history is woven.

After his studies under Perret, Liberman worked with the great poster-designer Cassandre, and then he moved out into the world, supporting himself as a writer, designer, film-maker, photographer—jack-of-all-esthetics you might say, at a time when Paris was emerging from late Cubism and Art Deco, into that steaming atmosphere where Surrealism and Neo-Romanticism fighting with Neo-Plasticism and Purism filled the city with its last intoxicating sensation of being the cosmopolitan laboratory for new ideas in the Western world.

Liberman's first mature pictures are strange mirrors of the period. At first glance they might seem Neo-Romantic (related to Bérard), but there is a cool, classic passion, which the young artist had made entirely his own, in these realist depictions of familiar scenes from his everyday life: the garden from his window, the street around the corner, views as well known to him as the inside of his pocket, each executed with a sharp, clear, calculated, even remorseless exactitude. One is reminded of the depopulated streets in René Clair's *Paris qui Dort*, except that gently apocalyptic vision was drenched with the nostalgia of walls and streets patinated by millions of human touches. In Liberman's paintings, the landscapes seem carved by a surgeon—conscientiously decontaminated, except for the virus of Ingres.

Liberman left France for America in 1941 and did not paint again until 1945. He shakes his head ruefully when he talks about this blank period. It was his own blackout.

Most of the American Abstract-Expressionists, during and immediately after the war, also struggled through anguished years when they couldn't paint, when art seemed finished, brought to a desperate standstill by the crisis of modern civilization. And many of them emerged from this experience with a new style, an exalted sense of mission, a set of brightly new, radical assumptions.



When Liberman started to paint again, in the summer of 1945, at Martha's Vineyard, he returned to the classical hypotheses to which he had been committed for a decade—only now he began to work through a little art-history of his own, from the dots of Post-Impressionism to the heavy textures of Braque, enlarging and thickening the brush marks, reducing the vista of his landscape-subject, pulling the image up to the surface for a single-impact effect.

Then, in the summer of 1949, while he was painting from sketches of Venice, a friend studied a certain picture of a gondola and a bridge in which the subject is practically devoured by emphatic brushstrokes, and asked, "Why don't you go the whole way?"

Within a short time, Liberman was embarked on his first series of abstractions.

He "abandoned nature" without a backward look and began to paint patterns of strokes which he would then study as he previously had studied the scene in front of him and move on to further patterns: it was a sort of "auto-inspiration." He enlarged sections of some works into images with fewer and fewer elements until finally there was only one shape in the picture—the brushstroke, which resolved itself into a circle.

Liberman does not consider this dramatic shift—from a view to a disc—as anything but an orderly progression—"I have always worked very logically," he says. And this emphasis upon his own inner consistency is one of the mysterious aspects of his art. Probably the resolution of the apparent contradiction lies in his hold on classicism which as an esthetic keeps in suspension both raw passion and civilizing form. One of its typical formulations is Pascal's advice to bet on the existence of God, because if you win the bet, you gain heaven, and if you lose, and there is no God, all you are out of pocket is a few hours of prayer. Pascal wrote this worldly *pensée* even as sewn inside the lining of his coat, next to his heart, was a piece of paper documenting his own rapturous confession of mystic faith. He must have felt that there was no contradiction between the two statements. Like Pascal, Liberman has made the dialectics of classicism a part of his temperament. You might say that analysis is a function of his metabolism; no matter where his art takes him or how far he pursues an orderly itinerary into the absurd and the delirious, Alex remains Alex.

(I am tempted to inject a bit of geo-esthetics here, for what it is worth: Liberman's conviction that his consistency informs even the most disparate aspects of his oeuvre is similar to Hofmann's and de Kooning's; all three were trained in Europe. The Americans who went through conversion experiences to achieve their new styles include Kline, Rothko, Newman, Gottlieb, all of whom grew up in America. Perhaps the European cultural base is more solid than the American one and permits an artist a wider range of options, while American hypotheses are apt to buckle under intellectual stress? But it won't do to push this proposal very far as it immediately encounters difficulties with such artists as Pollock and David Smith, to mention only two Americans who developed without any violent changes, and Giacometti and Dubuffet, two Paris artists who did. Possibly it is less a matter of geography than of the availability of a vital tradition to the young artist. Certainly

the American painters and sculptors of the 1960s seem to have flourished almost from the cradle within the benign limitations of New York Abstract-Expressionism.)

In September, 1950, Liberman cleared his metaphysical table and painted a red circle containing a blue circle on a yellow ground.

He had noticed that many of his old works were peeling badly, so he switched to enamel paints and also to industrial panels of masonite and aluminum as supports, instead of stretched canvas.

It sounds fairly commonplace in the telling—de Kooning and Pollock had been using enamels since the 1940s (perhaps influenced by Siqueiros); the Bauhaus and de Stijl artists had experimented with factory-made surfaces, but in essence Liberman had ventured out on a path of exploration that would prefigure much of the so-called “Hard-Edge” abstract art of the following decades and would add a new and unexpected richness to the milieu of New York based, international painting.

It was a step-by-step adventure.

He had long felt that the “ego is hateful,” and so he eliminated all handwriting—all traces of individualistically hesitant or bravura finger-and-wrist motions. He painted flat in enamels which dry to a porcelainized surface—“why not use refrigerator white?” Then came another logical step away from the “me”—he planned the picture and had it painted by another hand. He ordered a picture to be made to specifications given over the telephone. On the backs of some pictures he pasted “instructions” on how its production could be undertaken; he hoped it would be possible to “score painting like you score music.” He felt that works should not have the false value of uniqueness, but be reproduceable, and he accepted the political implications that this concept adds to the esthetic (art-for-everybody).

The painter is no longer a manipulator of materials, but a philosopher whose vocabulary is made up of visual rather than verbal or mathematical elements. (Leonardo da Vinci would have agreed—in theory.)

And he had found the main theme which has preoccupied him ever since—the circle. Why a circle?

Well, for one thing, Liberman found that the circle finally freed him from Cubism and the doctrines of Lhote. “The circle doesn’t rest on anything,” he says, “it doesn’t relate to the sides of the picture.” It is a neutral element, independent of the structure of the format, and it breaks the rigid conventions of pictorial relationships. In his old realist pictures, he got rid of composition by reproducing with detached precision the information he saw in his own backyard. But, alas, the eye is a camera, it obeys the laws of perspective and it is apt to sneak compositions into the most randomly observed glimpse of disorganized nature. The circle, on the other hand, has its own centrifugal and centripetal dynamism; it locks into itself; it has its own pictorial existence.

In other words, pragmatist Alexander Liberman turned to industrial materials because they were more efficient than his old oils and rolls of canvas at the same time as philosopher Alexander Liberman was evolving a complicated intellectual pro-

gram that would make the function of his hard-edged image depend precisely on the exploitation of such materials. This is the sort of merging of ends and means upon which almost all major art depends, and it often provokes chicken-or-the-egg discussions which can only be ended by pointing out that the artist is a man who has to cause his own happy accidents. The same holds true for Liberman's choice of the circle theme which pragmatically broke the Cubist yoke; it also was the perfect vehicle to express a wide range of his experiences and insights. He was pleased by its elemental quality, its closeness to archetypal sources; it contains a whole dictionary of symbols, as if it were a matrix from which is imprinted a history of man's myths and sciences. ("Imprint" is one of Liberman's favorite words in discussing the function of art; it is how the viewer receives the artist's form direct, without sifting it through a conventional eschatology.)

The simplicity of the circle also adds its own complex ambiguities to the image. It presents a three-fold pictorial illusion—the line which goes round and round; the top of a cylinder projecting towards you; the mouth of a tunnel going away from you. There are endless other allusions—to Cézanne's apples, the sun, the parts of the body; "it is mystical and noble," says Liberman, "it offers a sense of entering into a space—into a void." The spectator is induced to fulfill his role—he penetrates the picture.

The fragment of a circle, as already indicated, can be the fraction of an equator, turning the arc in a painting into a synecdoche, an image of the earth, "a small visible section of a greater reality."

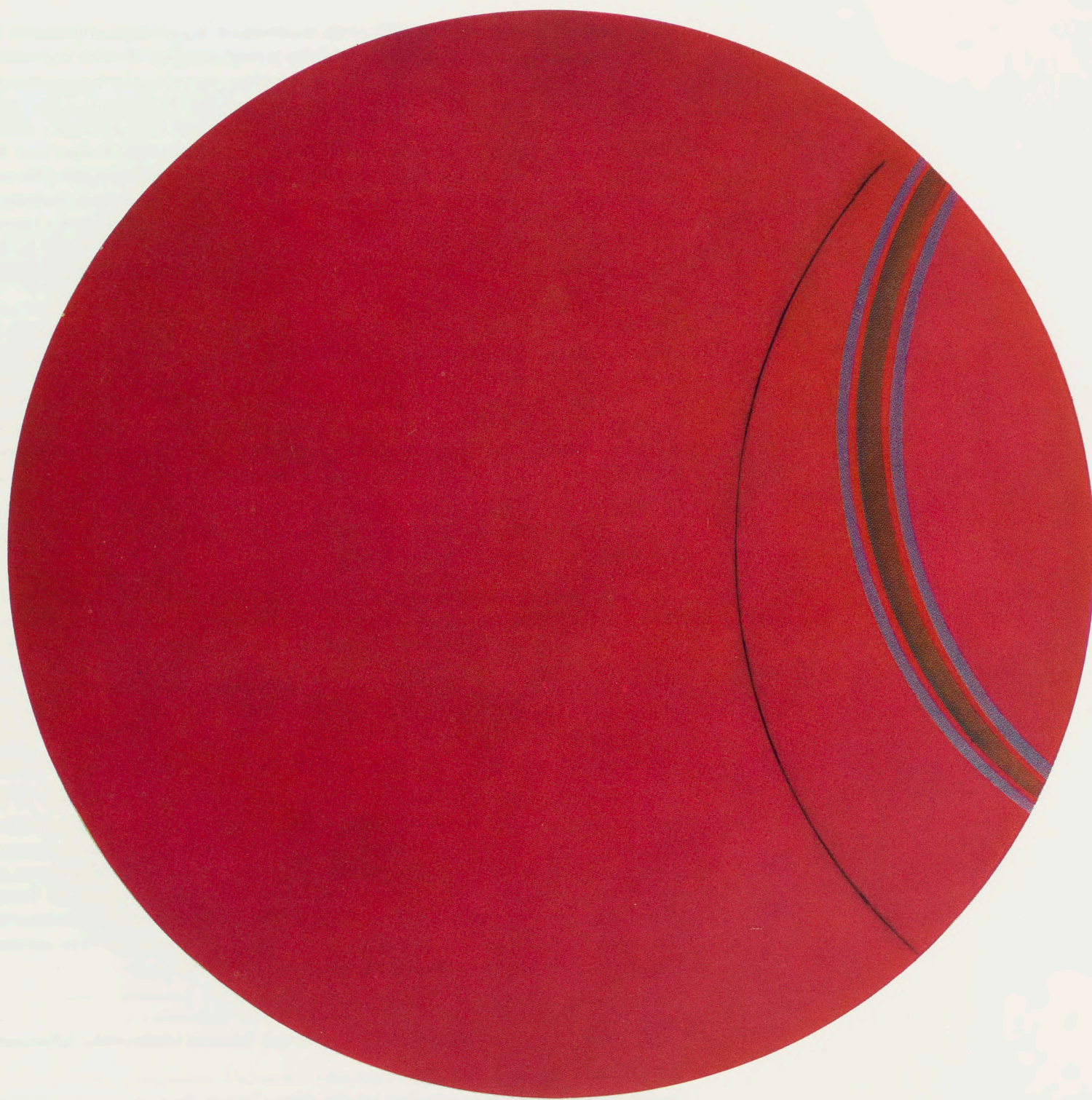
Liberman spent over 10 years (1950-1963) making explicit this theme and its poetic and technical resources. He systematically introduced random elements and chance to remove his carefully drawn image from the mess of subjectivity. Colors were picked by throwing dice or using the I-Ching. On one white panel (*Six-hundred and Thirty-nine*, 1959), he tossed pokerchips, one at a time, then circled each chip where it fell and had a friend fill in each spot with black. He experimented with after-images, placing a black circle on a red field in such a way that immaterial orange spots seem to scuttle like ghostly crickets across the plane.

Each idea suggested by his new mediums and varied themes was pushed to its extreme conclusion. He perfected the open, big-impact, single-focus look; the uncomposed shapes that release a maximum color sensation. In these areas, Liberman certainly was close to the work of such artists as Newman and Rothko whom he had known since 1951, whose works he admired and whose company he found stimulating. But his classical, cool stance and the involved, logical substructure that balanced it, placed him apart from their more direct, inward-seeking visions. If his strategy was to eliminate the self, theirs was to embody it.

(Of course, an artist usually gets what he throws away.)

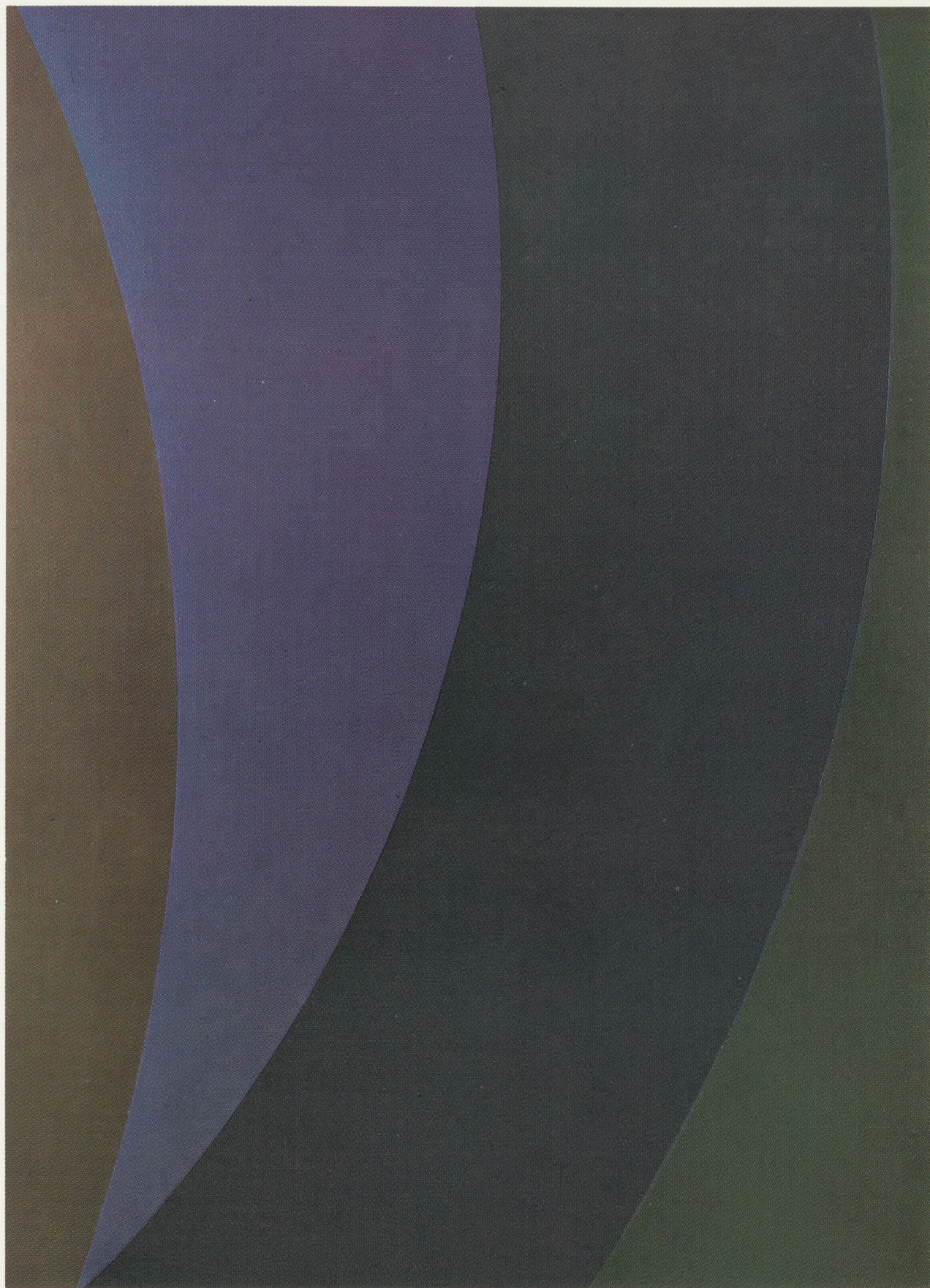
In the early 1960s, just as Hard-Edge abstraction became fashionable, Liberman abandoned it.

He felt he understood too well what he was doing; "it was becoming a trick; repetitious; precision was turning into neatness; I was bored and wanted to go further;



39. PARMENIDES IV, 1963

34. THE GREAT MYSTERIES I, 1962



the optical vibrations in a minimal concept was not enough." He had been following a procedure of "total negation" and found that it had led him away from the self beneath the self, away from his identity as an artist. He decided to switch assumptions, turn Mies van der Rohe's epigram inside out, and say "more is more."

This, of course, was Liberman working at a philosophical level, engaged in logical thinking, just as his selection of the circle theme was because of the "inescapable structure" of the shape and his use of industrial materials and the laws of chance were exercises in distanceization⁴ from the ego.

But there were practical, pragmatic developments which reinforced—if they did not in fact initiate—the decision to abandon the Hard-Edge style.

In 1959, his housekeeper in the south of France married a blacksmith, and he introduced Liberman to the techniques of welding. "I'll never forget," he says, "the first time I looked into an arc-flame—welding became a turning-point." He recognized the same "primordial elements" in that brightness that he had seen in the circle, only here they were not metaphysical or symbolic but earthly, "smoke and fire." It was a vision of reality.

He had made some plasters in the early 1950s, and at the turn of the decade, some industrially fabricated "preconceived" pieces which presented polished aluminum circles and discs as fine as machines could tool them. In 1959, he began to delight in the rough craft of cutting and joining and in the bruised look of worked steel. His sculptures were made of junk, and had the rusty patina of abandoned machinery.

Then, in 1962, "Liquitex came into my life, like a beautiful woman."

He also was introduced to large rolls of cotton duck as a painting surface which offered the freedom of an open field, and to the squeegee as an applicator.

Experimenting with these "new" materials as rigorously as he had with the industrial products of his Hard-Edge abstractions, Liberman began to pour, slosh and throw color over the surface of the duck laid out on his studio floor. He tried thinning the paints with turpentine (breaking all the rules of acrylics), applying enamel over acrylic undercoats, adding surface-tension breaking solvents. He wanted to work as fast as possible, "to bypass the intellect and get to my own." Readings in Kierkegaard reinforced his longing for the immediate and for that evocation of passion which alone can verify an act of faith.

Here again the dramatic change in style came from two simultaneous events—the encounter with new materials, the evolution of a different concept. But just as the artist considered that he acted perfectly consistently in his transition from a realist image to a totally abstract one, so, in his move to the informal, fluid, "action" image, he finds no discrepancies or contradictions. He did not abandon his classical ideals, nor had he proceeded against the dictates of logic—whatever appearances might indicate. Indeed, the circle motif dominated the new image, not as a blunt sign, but in fuzzed arcs, often to the side of the painting, usually marking the area of greatest activity or brightest color. And the squeegee with its long ferrule is a perfect device for keeping the "me" from getting into the picture. You couldn't find a better anti-

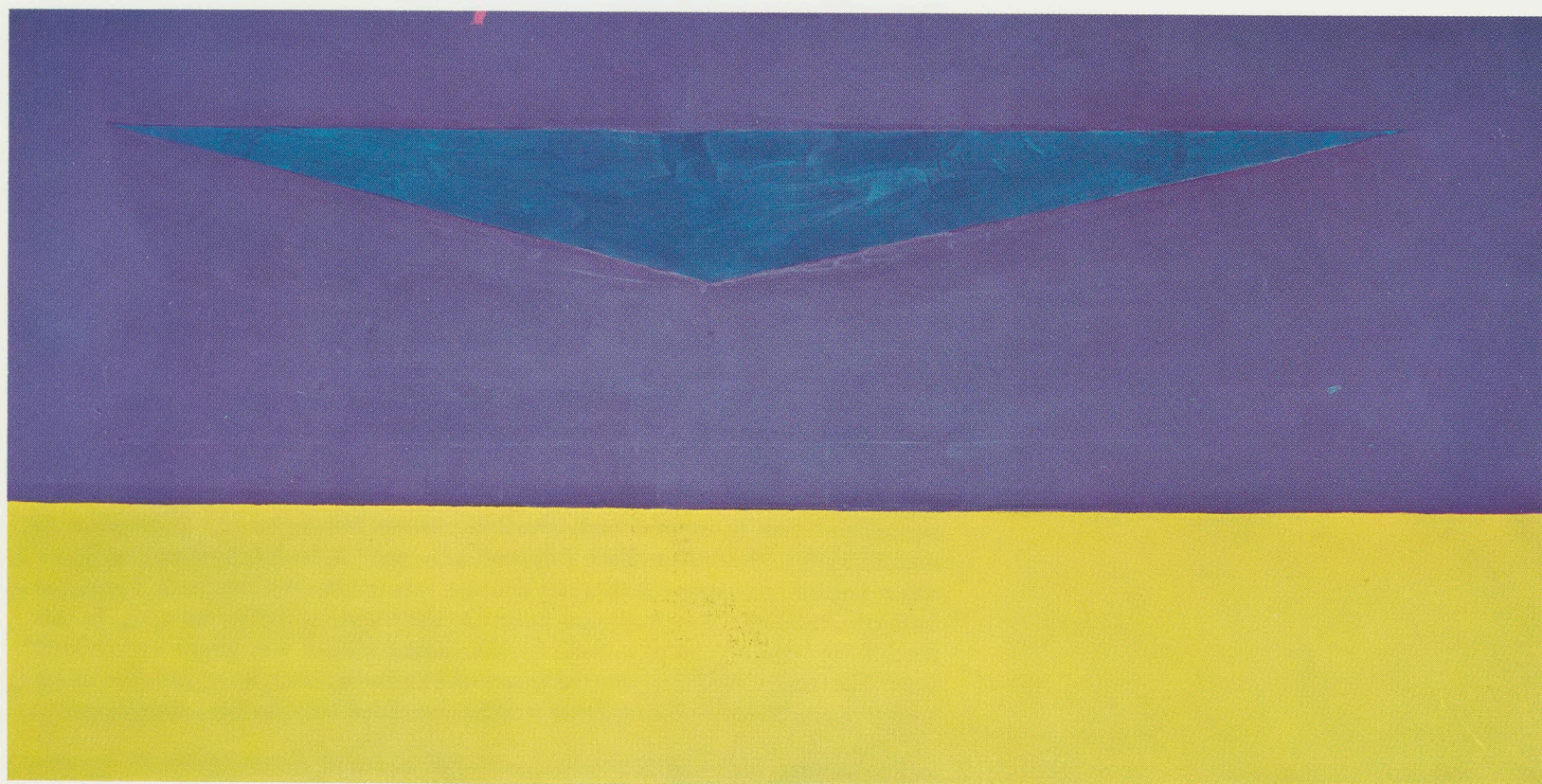
artist weapon, and its actual dimension is a paradigm of classical objectivity. Finally, the speed of execution which Liberman sought and attained to the point where his huge pictures seem created out of one gasp—this speed is a perfect translation into pictorial terms of Boileau's triadic unities.³

Just as Liberman's abstractions of the early 1950s prophesied many of the directions Hard-Edge and Color-Field abstraction would take towards the end of the decade, so his fluent, boldly poured and streaked abstractions of the early 1960s contain the look of much of the new paintings of today, as exemplified in the works of such artists as Poons, Diao, Pettet, Landfield and others.

There is something extraordinary in this phenomenon. Liberman is a man apart from the give-and-take of the New York art scene as it is played in cafés, lofts, summer-resorts, schools and in the guerrilla-theaters of the art-gallery streets. He avoids radiating charisma as he shuns head-colds. His work never sold particularly well. His exhibitions on the whole have been received with more antagonism than understanding. The Corcoran Gallery's exhibition is his first important retrospective—after some 35 years of intense work (the curators have had a warehouse full of works from which to make their selections). And yet his ideas have had a very wide if unacknowledged circulation where it counts the most—among the artists. I don't mean that Liberman has followers or disciples; rather he has made available a wide spectrum of technical and conceptual accomplishments. And in his almost obsessional rush to explore each possibility to its fullest, he has given clues to images which other artists have followed at length. Indeed Liberman has had a major impact on younger artists not because they understood his basic ideas, but as they adapted his multitudinous means to their various individual ends. In this respect, he reminds me of a great teacher whose course was above everybody's head, but who profoundly affected many of his pupils through the richness of his erudition and the wonderfully fresh way he associated ideas in long digressions.

As his paintings of the 1960s became more open and fluid, the circles barely appearing, like currents in a riptide, Liberman's sculptures tended to hark back to the Hard-Edge. In the early '60s, they were made of boilers, discarded steel plates and pipes, painted black. They have a scarecrow silhouette, akimbo against the horizon. Then he moved to larger, more ambitious projects made of new steel pipes and cylinders. The circle remained the basic theme, echoed in twisting pipes interacting in fast thin actions against slow chunky cylinders. They had some of the quirky spontaneity that Liberman was reaching for in his paintings, but the large open and closed volumes made for a more formal, indeed architectural effect. Perret would have approved. Since 1966, he has painted them cadmium-red, which is the most abstract of colors and also, with a typically Liberman bit of serendipity, chemically the most efficient pigment for steel.

About three years ago, he introduced a new shape into his paintings—the triangle.⁵ The form might have come from a collision of circles. If you take three of them (0 0 0) and push the outside ones together until they meet in the middle, at the top center is an isosceles triangle facing down, with a concave base and two convex legs. It suggests flight—a gull's outspread wings.



66. UP-BLUE BETWEEN VIOLET AND YELLOW, 1968-69

Whether or not his triangle evolved in this manner, Liberman decided that the shape could break through the limitations of a composition as successfully as a circle, and it is a more active shape. "It has levitation and suspension," says Liberman, "envelopment and enclosure; what I've always wanted."

"Composition," for Liberman, is a heavy settling of forms down upon their haunches: a deathly stasis. Every shape, he feels, has a mass and weight which pulls it toward another shape—"an attraction through gravitation." It is the task of the artist both to reveal this force and to liberate himself from it. In other words, he must give his shape independence, set it free of the gravitational pull. The problem is to find a shape he can control. Liberman's circle is free in and of itself—it can be breast or omphalos, Aten or pokerchip, threshold between inward and outward pressures, receiving one and emitting the other. The triangle, for Liberman, soars—the rising sun.

He translated this insight into his sculptures; acts of levitation and suspension were performed on huge hollow steel masses and bent sheets. These recent works look like miracles—enormous red volumes thrust up into space, become weightless, "ascensions," even as they announce their enormous metal bulk.

Levitation and suspension—in the Middle Ages they called it Resurrection and Transfiguration.

Which brings us to the content of Liberman's art.

He has made many small changes in his style and at least three drastic ones, but it remains unchanged because that immanent thing in his work which we call content—the thing that it is all about—has remained unchanged. Its consistency does not come from his consistently classical approach; classicism, in the last analysis, is only a tool, like a favorite color or brush or compass which has grown in importance as it has grown in familiarity, becoming more an extension of the artist's body than an independent construct.

Beyond classicism, beyond the culture from which it and Liberman grew, beyond the operative ideas and methods of art, we enter an area where words are imprecise. After all, one of the points of a painting or a sculpture is to say things which have no linguistic equivalents. And the issue is made more difficult in Liberman's case because at the root of his art is a religious feeling, and this, too, eludes accurate terminologies.

Liberman works in giant scale because this is the size which sets up an immediate, intimate rapport between the art and the viewer. We move close to his paintings. We enter his sculpture. And once there, drawn and held by the image, there is a sense of awe. The painting is very big; the image is beyond us. There is immediate pleasure in looking at the swift motions of color, at the svelte turning of a bright cylinder against a bright wall. And when these sensual pleasures are felt with immediacy, there comes the awareness that the moment will pass, as everything passes, and we are left with the thought of death.

"Death?" I asked Liberman.

"Death," he said, with a small Rasputin smile.

"And beyond death?" I asked.

He sat as elegantly as ever, in a hard-backed chair (sculptors always have back-trouble), legs crossed, fingers to chin—a composition in dark blue and grey cashmere triangles.

"God," he said.

"God?"

"God!"

It reminded me of another conversation when he described one of his Hard-Edge abstractions with three circles in a row. "I was thinking," he said, "of the word 'god'—the circle of the 'g' and its descender, the circle of the 'd' with its ascender, the circle 'o' in the center; descent to hell on the left; resurrection on the right; the circle, the world, life, in the center . . ." He laughed a bit apologetical "I used to have lots of mad ideas about letters," he added, "and words; they're very mysterious; think of 'm o m.'"

But "g o d," I thought, only works in English, and then only in lower-case, which may be blasphemous; I wondered whether Alex was a Manichean.

At this level, the useful exegesis of art can no longer depend on the usages of language. The issue reverts to Liberman's paintings and sculptures. You can think about them and peel off meaning after meaning—Wittgenstein's onion—and finally end up with something which you can't describe, but it can be felt. In a clumsy sort of way it can even be classified:

The basis of Liberman's art is the mystery of art—a chaotic, dark, obsessional power out of which he works to create his own life and his images. His effort does not depend upon his classicism nor the high European culture which he represents with such distinction. In mood, he is much closer to some poor monster staggering down West Broadway shouting at the streetlamps that he is lonely and capable of changing the face of the world, only nobody listens.

With the other American artists of his generation, Liberman has had to make his own shapes out of the big nothing that America supplies so bounteously to all her citizens. Invent new forms, always starting from scratch.

He is one of us.

Notes

1. Readers will remember that the inscription over the main gate of Rabelais' utopian monastery includes the verses:

Cy entrez, vous, dames de hault paraige, . . .

Fleurs de beaulté à céleste visaige,

A droit corsaigne . . .

and that its motto was:

FAY CE QUE VOULDRAS

2. The conversion phenomenon in modern American art first was described and analyzed by Elaine de Kooning in her essay on Rothko and Kline (Art News Annual, 1957-58).
3. Qu'en un lieu, qu'en un jour, un seul fait accompli,
Tienne jusqu'à la fin le théâtre rempli. Boileau
4. Or distancing; Brecht's *entfremdung*.
5. About this same time, Liberman's friend Barnett Newman began to experiment with the triangle. They came to opposite conclusions. Both exhibited their new paintings in the winter of 1969. Liberman's triangles pointed down, the legs spreading to the base like wings. Newman's were apex up, the shape poised for flight like a Delta wing. Neither had seen the other's work until its exhibition.



109. EVE, 1969

The Sculpture: from a conversation between Walter Hopps and Alexander Liberman

In 1954 I first saw a work by Alexander Liberman—a painting, a very startling and, as it turns out, important painting, in James Johnson Sweeney's sprawling survey of "Younger American Painters." My high regard for this painting (and, of course, others) remains undiminished to this day. Painting became the important medium for Liberman before sculpture and he continues to be thought of today primarily as a painter. Curiously, it turns out—as much by chance as design—that I have seen much more of his sculpture than his painting. Notwithstanding what might be considered the bias of my own experience I have the firm conviction that Liberman's stature as a sculptor now clearly equals his stature as a painter.

Recently Alexander Liberman and I spent an evening talking, primarily about his sculpture. Below are selections of what each of us had to say.

AL: Perhaps it's important not to execute the sculptures oneself. I have felt that Calder, for instance, became monumental and greater when he had them fabricated. It frees the artist from the actual physical—

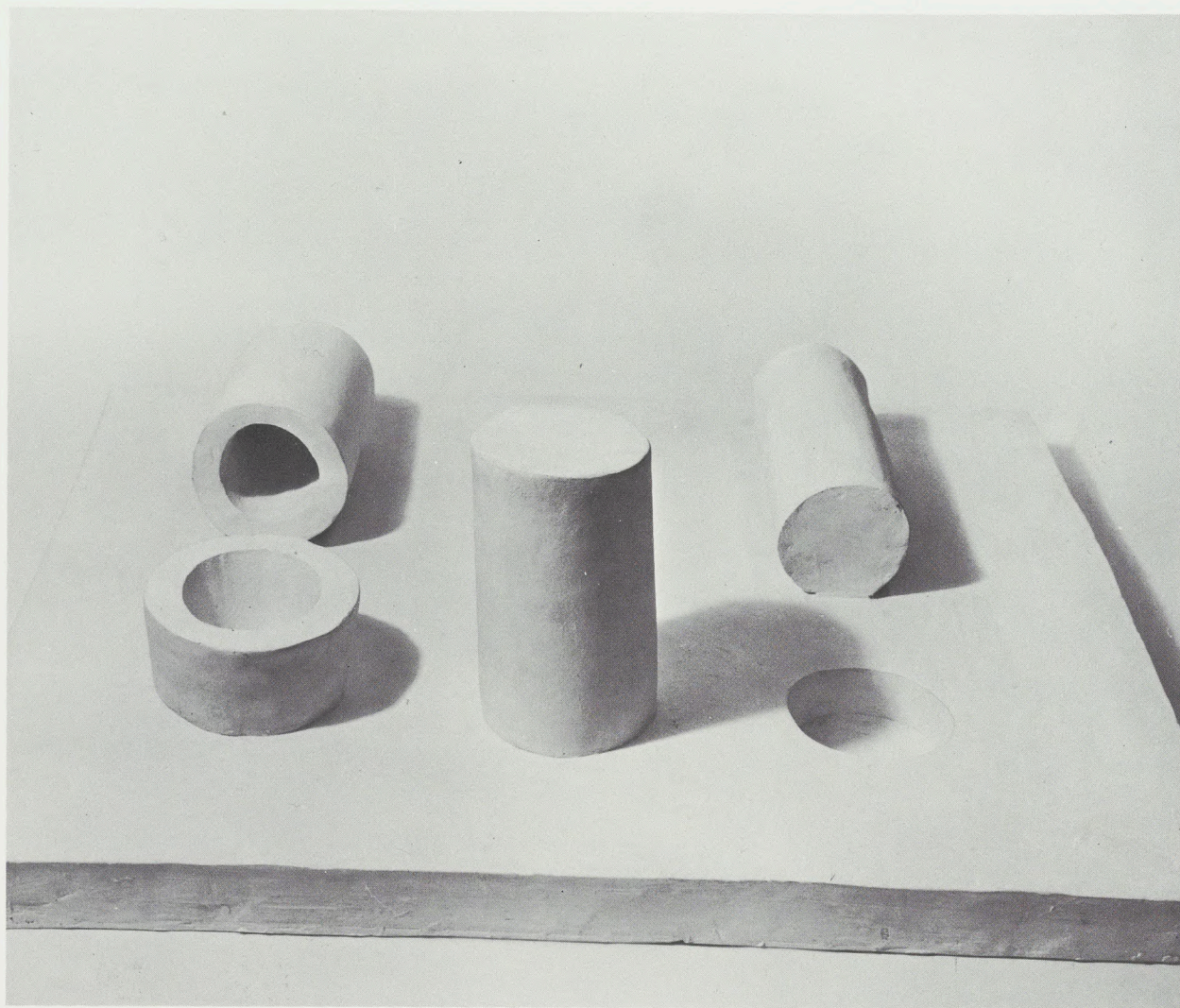
WH: If it depends on your eye and sight—

AL: If you say, oh my God I'd like to have that piece up there but it's too heavy for me to lift—then you're lost.

AL: But you know, again a very important point—it's to let things lie fallow, you know. For instance, pieces of metal . . . I remember practically every piece of metal lying around the studio, and the field. They will lie sometimes for at least two or three years, these tanks, and I tried to make a sculpture with them about two years ago but wasn't ready for it—I couldn't do it. And it was bad, I destroyed it. I have some snapshots. But the point is, you have to let things lie, and then—somehow they work inside of you, and at a certain moment you're ready for them, and at a certain moment, it's just mysterious what happens.

You just say, where is that piece, where is this piece—you remember that piece over there, would you bring it then, I need it for this. You suddenly need that piece. And it's a very interesting revelation for one's own mental process, that suddenly happens.

AL: I've never done a commission, I refuse to do a commission, because that becomes a purpose. Then accident is eliminated, it becomes a program.



75. SPACE, 1952

WH: All of a sudden, around 1952 . . . we have those extraordinary small white plaster objects, three-dimensional sculptural objects (SPACE, 1952, no. 75).

AL: I'm trying to remember how I came to the cylinders . . . when you work with a circle, you arrive at a cylinder . . . quite simply and logically. The circle was the continuum, seen like a rod, I mean seen in depth, as I remember. But let me state another very important thing—I was always interested in the full and the void.

AL: But you have to accept accidents. You see, the key to the whole thing is accident. In flow, in finding, in accepting—you cannot have a total preconceived idea. When I have the bulldozers bend the tank, well it may be off two inches or four, may be a totally different shape, but it's equivalent to the pouring of paint.

WH: There are pieces of yours that have a kind of emblematic presence, but there are as many or more pieces of yours that do not depend on a kind of frontal, heraldic impact—yes, probably more than don't. And that relates exactly to what you're saying about the accidental, the incidental, the very spontaneous, suddenly observed position, as you move about in vantage point in space.

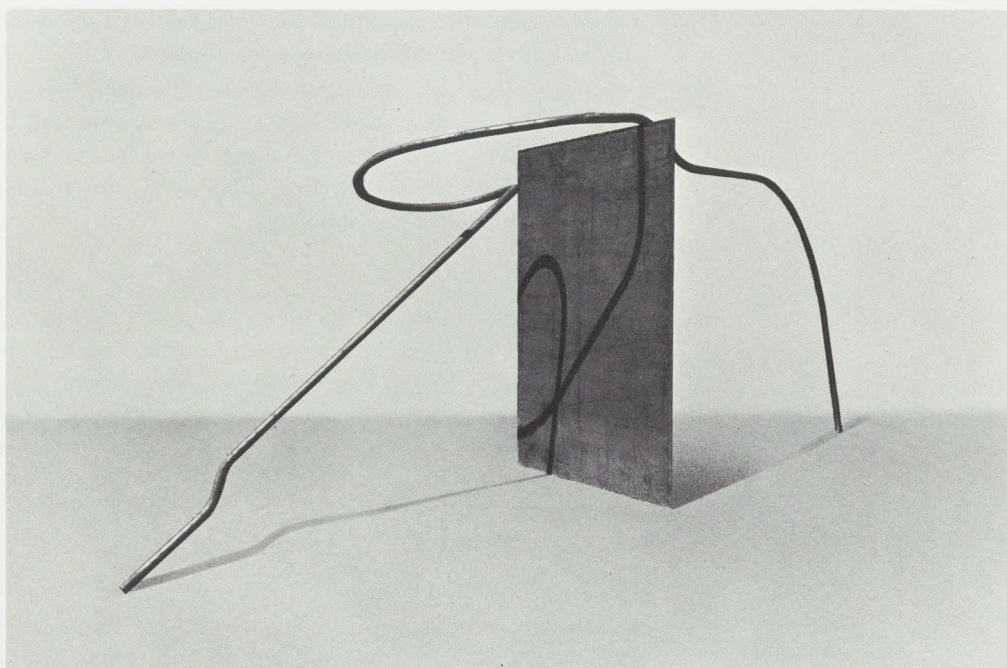
AL: Another point is, watching for the so-called accident, to expose oneself to chance—found objects don't necessarily have to be just obvious. Light is a found object, itself. I've always believed in accidents . . . like throwing the poker chips for the dot paintings . . . to see a piece of metal suspended on a crane, turning in space . . . The moment that no mind can preconceive. This is why I abandoned working, you know, with models or drawings in advance.

WH: Your natural approach to drawing involves extraordinary freedom, spontaneity. And that is to deal with chance patterns, hand ahead of mind. Your sculptural process seems to parallel closely your drawing process . . . drawing, not as diagramming. (TRACE, 1967, no. 100)

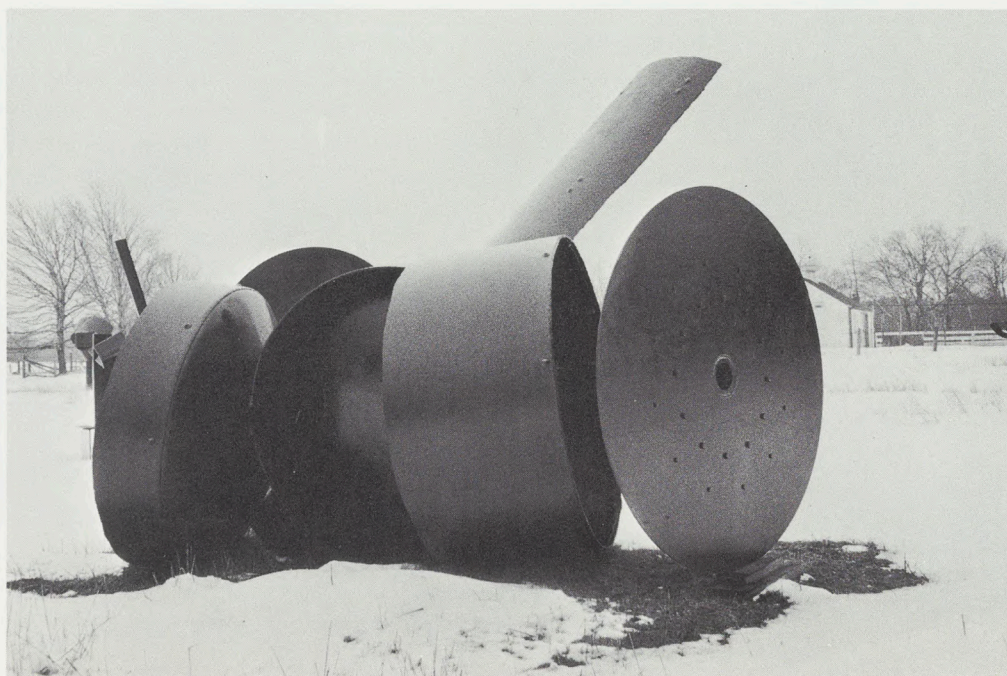
AL: I spend my time attempting the structurally impossible—I do it, and it doesn't hold up. Then one has to struggle for a year, to see how to make that impossible possible.

WH: Right. In other words, your invention and aspirations move beyond your "limit" . . .

AL: . . . which I choose to ignore.



100. TRACE, 1967



95. REALMS, 1966

WH: Well, in the sculptural forms there is this sense of thin planes drawn about in all three dimensions, moved at will, to make contours, to make enclosures, to make solid forms. But still with this sense—I think it's very important, your tendency to cut away or slice cylinders, or volumes, or to have built into the same piece sections that relate to what is whole. So that we're always reminded of this thin, drawing-like skin of enclosed space, rather than a contiguous solid chunk.

AL: I find it very difficult to create a volume . . .

WH: It's a spatial displacement rather than a solid. And I don't think that one draws, when you begin—in other words, your works are not stones amassed here. Perceived, felt, a rather spontaneous skin, and line, assembled to displace, and declare, and encompass space.

WH: There is something that's very special that your work has in contrast to other abstract sculpture in this country . . . a buoyancy, or lightness—volumetric displacement without the sensation of mass. In a sense, gravity working against a solid mass does not pertain in your sculpture. For example, David Smith does exactly what you don't. In many instances, especially in steel, with every volumetric displacement on the part of Smith, there's a sense of its solidity all the way through . . . There are many things you were doing on the painting surface that give a solidity . . . that you did not do with the plaster. When we move into pieces where you do use a bar moving through space, the sense that it is a skin of bar that is lighter somehow than it even looks, is maintained.

AL: And then the black sculptures, you know—the tanks. I wanted to work on a big scale, and it's the cheapest material you can get. There's a question of cost—it's terribly important in sculpture. I mean, you can buy tanks cheap. Also, a curved shape, structurally, is much stronger. You can put up a taller vertical piece if it's curved than if it's flat, so the tank seemed like an ideal raw material. And it's astounding, you know, you can buy gigantic tanks as discards. (REALMS, 1966, no. 95. AROUND, 1966, no. 96)

WH: Your work involves certain extraordinary perceptions about light.

AL: . . . sculpture is really an out-of-doors work—painting is indoors and sculpture is out-of-doors; the case with me. Because painting doesn't depend on light. You can work with artificial light, you can work with north light, you can work with any light. But sculpture, I don't think you can.

WH: There's your tendency to have the apex of the triangle pointed down. (ADAM, 1969, no.108).

AL: Absolutely.



108. ADAM, 1969

WH: Rather than it resting on a more firm base, rising to an apex, you use the least stable . . .

AL: You have hit upon a key point. You see, because for me a triangle, as a pyramid, is a sign of death, really; they were death monuments. Well, the triangle form, inverted, open, rising, or the circle suspended implies for me, abstractly, elevation of the spirit (through sculpture or painting) into realms rendered immaterial. It's the immaterial that is important.

WH: The sense of what you said of delicacy—

AL: Tenderness practically.

WH: Yes, in many cases tenderness, delicacy . . . In many very human encounters, the successful or most positive first encounter is exactly that of an extraordinary open and delicate first touch, first encounter, that then isn't second-guessed, with all the load that had nothing to do with the immediacy of that encounter brought to bear on it.

AL: Sculpture is an encounter. Very important word, I think, in sculpture.

AL: . . . you see, I think if art is involved with what interests me, the sort of higher realm of being—sounds pretentious, but that's what it's about otherwise why do we do it—the greatest subtlety is necessary. You cannot express, in my opinion, what I'm interested in, with a sledgehammer. So perhaps, without actually knowing it, my nature resists mass—because I find mass something obtuse. And I think there has to be an opening . . . I think one has to penetrate. I mean, we all come back to this eternal problem of penetration. And if the form is closed, there's no penetration. It penetrates you. And I think we have to be drawn into the mystery.

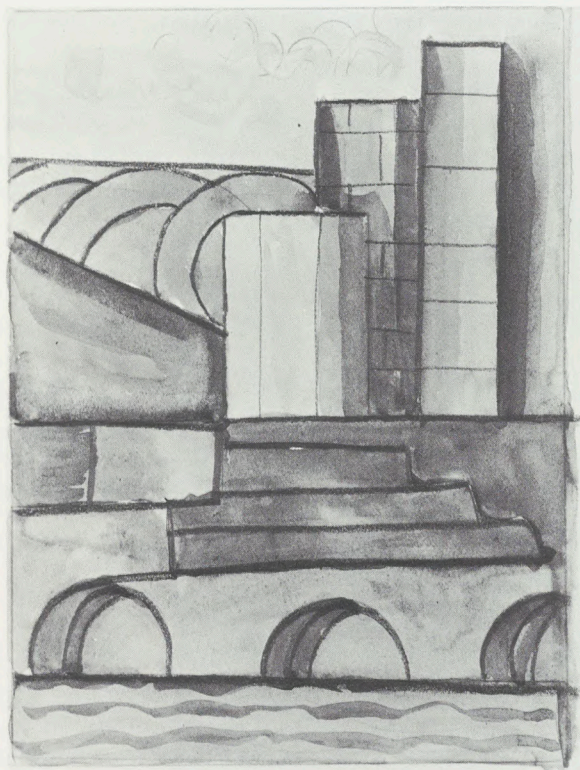


Fig. 1 UNTITLED, 1925

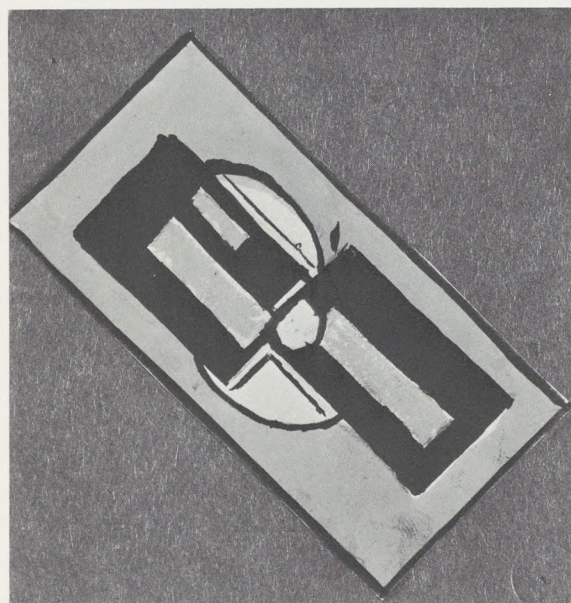


Fig. 2 ABSTRACTION, 1925

CHRONOLOGY

- 1912 Born in Kiev, Russia, the only child of Simon Liberman and Henriette Pascal Liberman. His father was a lumber merchant.
- 1913-17 The family moved to St. Petersburg. Under the influence of his mother he did his first drawings at age 3 or 4.
- 1917 Family moved to Moscow.
- 1919-20 His mother created the first state theater for children where many Constructivist artists designed the costumes and stage sets for the plays by Kipling, Mark Twain, Robert Louis Stevenson, etc.
- Photography was an early interest of the artist. His father gave him his first camera, a vest-pocket Kodak, in 1920.
- 1921 Brought out of Russia by his father and left in London. Attended prep school at the University School, Hastings and St. Pirans, Maidenhead until 1924.
- 1924-29 In Paris joined his parents who had left Russia.
- Attended the Ecole des Roches, a progressive school where, in addition to general studies, he took classes in modeling and drawing (both fine and industrial) and learned to work at a forge, his first contact in working with metal.
- His mother always wanted him to be an artist. Took him on numerous museum trips to Italy. Became acquainted with many artist-friends of the family, especially other Russian émigrés such as Chagall and Exter, as well as French artists like Leger.
- Executed numerous drawings and sketches. (fig. 1 and 2)
- 1930 Received a Baccalaureate degree in Philosophy and Mathematics from the Sorbonne.
- 1931-32 Studied painting with André Lhote in 1931.
- Entered the Ecole Spéciale d'Architecture. Studied under Auguste Perret, founder of the modern technique of reinforced concrete construction. Left the Ecole Spéciale, as it did not grant official diplomas necessary to practice architecture in France. Entered the Ecole



Fig. 3 VILLA MONTMORENCY, 1937-38

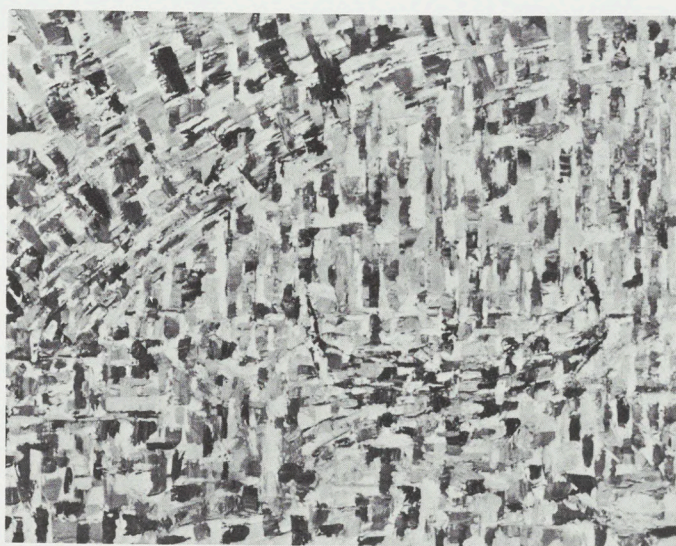


Fig. 4 VENETIAN SCENE, 1947-48

des Beaux Arts, architectural section. While attending classes in the morning, he supported himself by working in the afternoon as an assistant to the French poster artist, Cassandre.

Soon became disenchanted with the Ecole des Beaux Arts. Began to work full time, first designing book-bindings and then doing architectural renderings in the office of a landscape architect.

1933 Asked by a friend, Lucien Vogel, to join the staff of *Vu*, one of the first illustrated magazines. Became art director, then managing editor, doing extensive color and layout work, film reviews and photomontage. The magazine afforded him the opportunity to meet and become friendly with the photographers Cartier-Bresson, Brassai, Blumenfeld, and Kertesz.

1935 Did stage design for children's theater in Paris.

1936 Left *Vu* at the suggestion of his father and devoted full time to painting, writing, and film making.

Made with the staff of the Louvre one of the first color films on painting "La Femme Française dans l'Art." Completed a film on English art which was never printed.

Paintings of this period show a sharp realism most often depicting familiar surroundings. (fig. 3)

1937 Won Gold Medal for Design, International Exhibition in Paris, for a presentation of how a magazine is put together.

1940 Mobilized by the French army with the advent of World War II.

Escaped Europe in December by way of Spain.

1941 Arrived in New York in January.

Persuaded by Lucien Vogel, then working for Condé Nast publications, to take a job with *Vogue Magazine*.

1942 Married Tatiana Yacovleff du Plessix.

1943 Became Art Director of *Vogue*.

1945 Had not painted during the war, but began again during a summer vacation at Martha's Vineyard.

1946 Obtained U.S. citizenship.

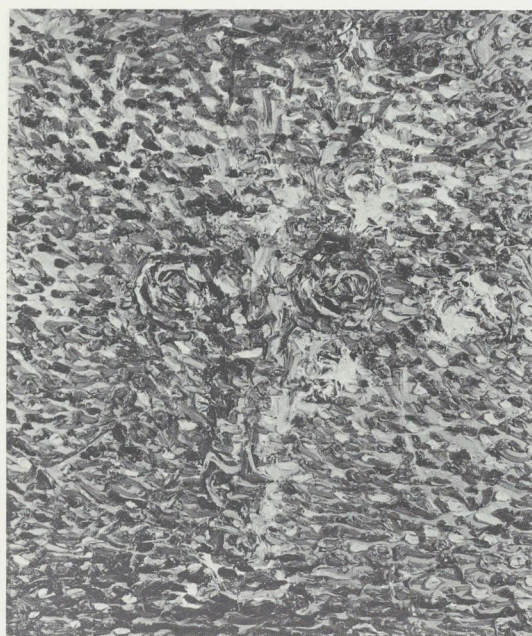


Fig. 5 TWO ROSES, 1948-49

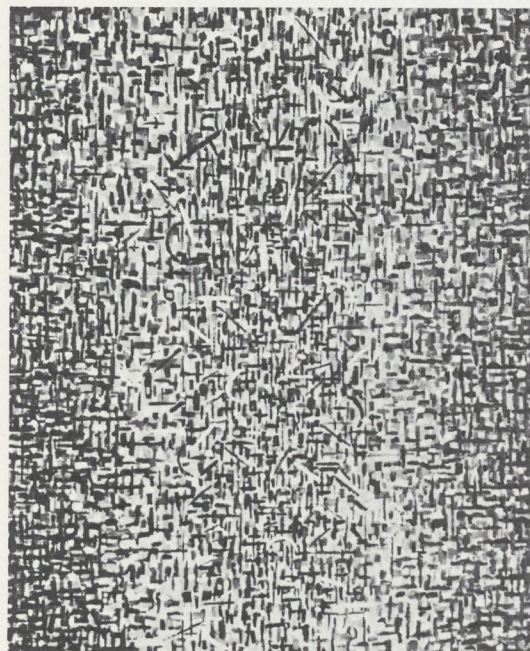


Fig. 6 UNTITLED, 1949

1947-49 Made first of annual trips to Europe. Painted landscapes in Venice (fig. 4). Began process of working out his "admiration" for European artists, particularly Seurat and Cézanne. Paintings became increasingly abstract, flat and concerned with overall pattern (fig. 5).

Started photographing artists of the School of Paris.

1950-53 In the winter of 1949-50 painted complete abstractions made up of brush stroke patterns (fig. 6). Then began to enlarge sections of these works using fewer and fewer elements (fig. 7) until he found shapes resembling circles. Thinking of Cézanne's theory that nature is reduceable to the sphere, the cylinder and the cube, he decided to pursue the circle, a form that relates to both the sphere and the cylinder and which the Cubists did not explore.

Did a group of paintings the summer of 1950 in which circles were painted freehand on canvas (fig. 8). Dissatisfied with the irregularities of freely drawn circles, he began in the fall of 1950 to paint compass drawn circles with industrial enamels on industrially sprayed masonite panels (nos. 1-5).

Became interested in the possibility of a reproduceable art. Experimented with paintings executed by an assistant, Ed Kasper, from drawings or instructions. Also made paintings with precise instructions for their reproduction pasted to the back.

1954 Exhibited *Two Circles*, 1950 (no. 2) in the Guggenheim Museum's "Younger American Painters" his first exhibition.

1955-57 Became dissatisfied with the limited colors available with industrial paints and returned to executing his own paintings in oil on canvas. Paintings involve increasingly complex systems (no. 19) and an increasing interest in after images (no. 18).

Paintings begin to explore the realm of accident and chance. Threw dice and used the *I Ching* to determine the colors in some paintings.

1958 Made drawings for a number of small sculptures that were executed in plexiglass and enamel by Ed Kasper (nos. 76, 77, 79).

1959 Learned to weld during the summer at St. Maxime, France, and produced his first welded sculpture.

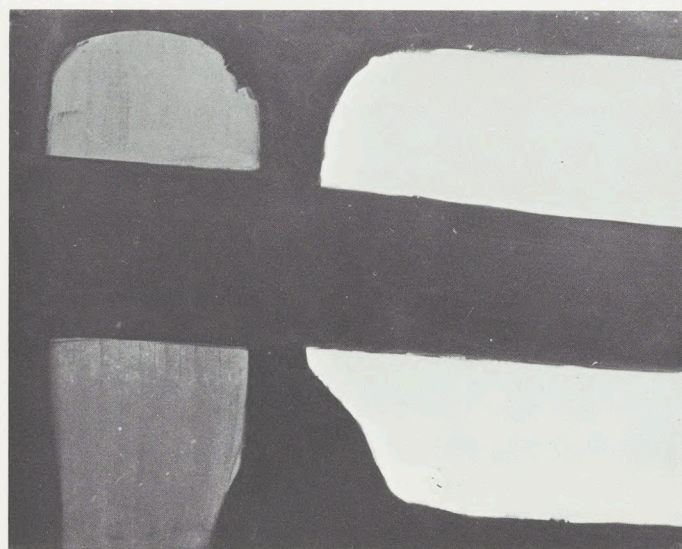


Fig. 7 UNTITLED, 1949

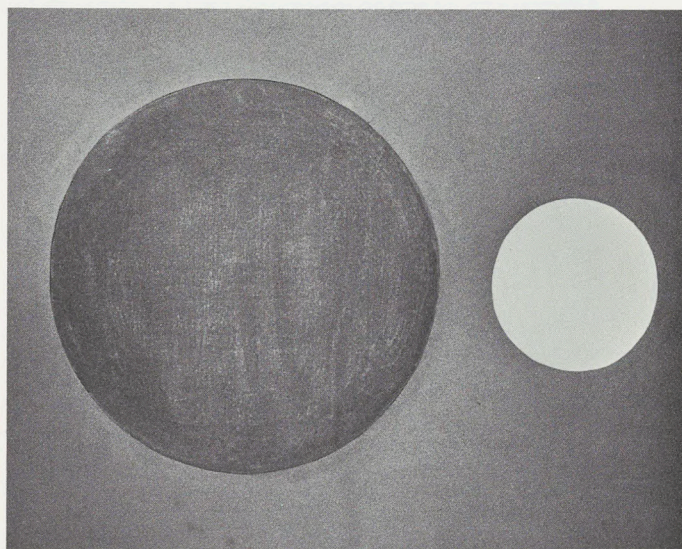


Fig. 8 UNTITLED, 1950

Tossed poker chips one by one onto a canvas to determine placement of dots in paintings such as *Six Hundred Thirty-nine* (no. 23).

Executed a large series of free or gestural drawings that look forward to his paintings of 1963-64 (figs. 9, 10, 11).

Moved his studio from his house to an ex-funeral home at 132 E. 70th Street.

Exhibition of his photographs, "The Artist in His Studio," held at The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

1960 First one-man exhibition at the Betty Parsons Gallery, New York.

Cleve Gray, who had married daughter Francine du Plessix, gave him a barn in Warren, Connecticut which enabled him to start welding and doing large works on his own.

Publication of his book, "The Artist in His Studio," by Viking Press.

1962 Became one of the first of many artists to use Treitel Gratz, a metal fabricating shop, then located at 32nd and Lexington Avenue. At first had hard edge works fabricated from drawings (no. 81) but began to experiment with freer effects through cutting and bending (no. 88).

Abandoned primary colors and began a more personal use of color for the first time since 1950 (nos. 34, 35, 36). Began to use Liquitex paints.

Exhibited at Betty Parsons Gallery.

Included in the Whitney Museum "Geometric Abstraction in America" exhibition.

Became Editorial Director of all Condé Nast Publications.

1963 First monumental sculpture, *Fire*, fabricated at Treitel Gratz (fig. 12). First appearance of the triangle form. Began to abandon hard edge for more gestural paintings (nos. 38, 40, 41, 42, 43).

Started to work with junk metal and old boilers in the fall, partially to alleviate the expense of fabrication (no. 87).

Exhibition at Betty Parsons Gallery.

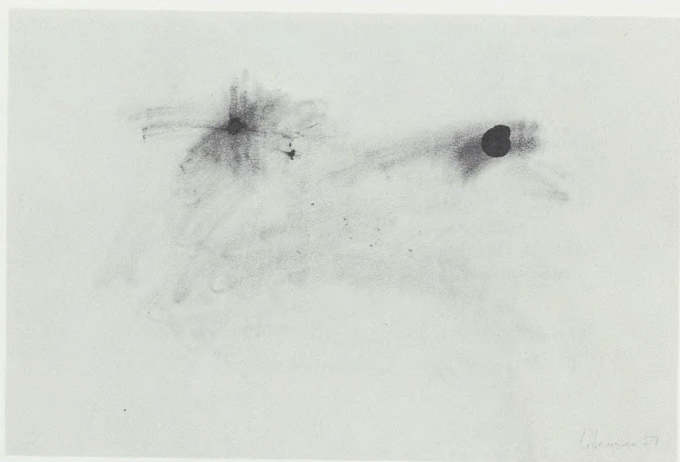


Fig. 9 ERASURE, 1959

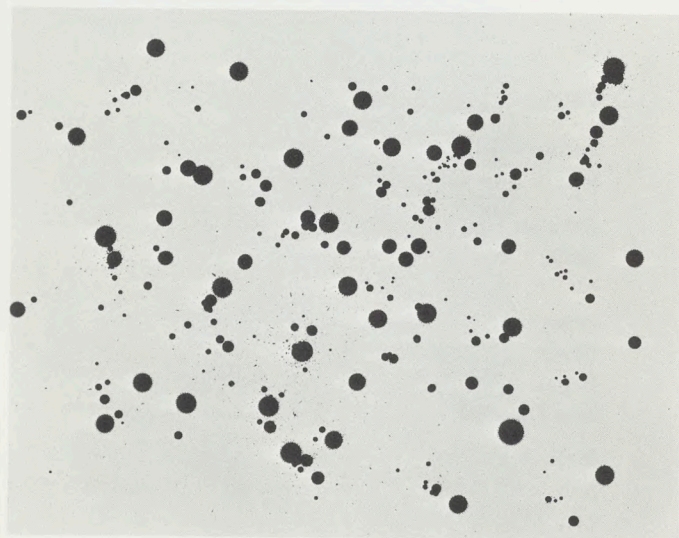


Fig. 10 UNTITLED, 1959

1964 Enlarged his studio to include upper floor at 132 E. 70th Street where the high ceilings made possible a new verticality in the paintings (no. 48). Toward the end of the year he began to work on a group of black paintings (nos. 49, 50).

Designed a sculpture, *Prometheus*, for the New York State Pavilion, New York Worlds Fair.

One-man exhibitions at Betty Parsons Gallery and at Bennington College.

Included in the Los Angeles County Museum's "Post Painterly Abstraction" exhibition.

1965 Working with Bill Layman, a welder in Warren, Connecticut, made it possible to execute large scale sculpture.

1966 Moved his sculpture studio into the larger space of Bill Layman's truck garage.

His friend, Helen Frankenthaler, brought Sam Hunter to see the new large sculpture, resulting in a one-man show of his sculpture at the Jewish Museum.

Exhibited at the Betty Parsons Gallery.

1967 Painted last of black paintings (no. 59) and Orb series (nos. 60, 61, 62).

Moved to a spacious new studio at 414 E. 75th Street. Exhibited paintings at the Betty Parsons Gallery. Began to exhibit sculpture at the Andre Emmerich Gallery with two exhibitions.

Included in the Los Angeles County Museum's "American Sculpture of the Sixties" exhibition.

Further exploration of the triangle form in paintings, both as a shape floating on a rectangular canvas (nos. 63, 64, 65, 66) and as a canvas shape (nos. 67, 68).

1968 In May began to work on a monumental sculpture, *Eve*, that was completed in the spring of 1970.

Exhibited *Tropic* (no. 106) at HemisFair '68 in San Antonio, Texas.

Included in The Museum of Modern Art "The Art of the Real: 1948-1968" exhibition.

Published *Greece, Gods and Art*, Viking Press.

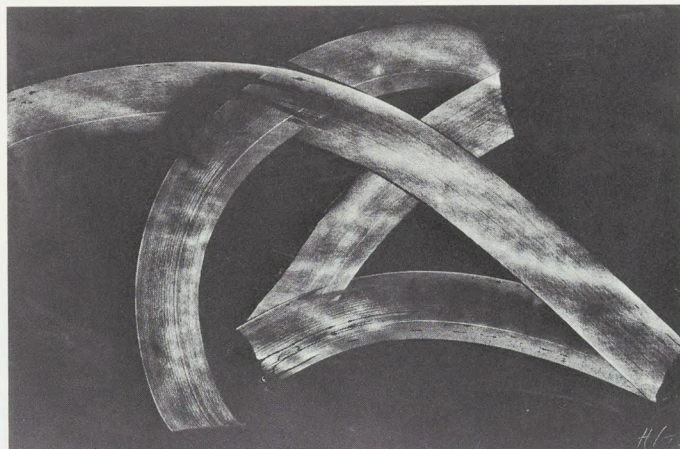


Fig. 11 UNTITLED, 1959



Fig. 12 FIRE, 1963

1969 Continued to work with triangle forms in his paintings (nos. 69, 70).

Exhibited paintings at the Betty Parsons Gallery and sculpture at Andre Emmerich Gallery.

1970 Completed work on four monumental sculptures, *Adam*, *Eve*, *Path* and *Firmament* (nos. 108, 109, 110, 111) and two monumental paintings, *Genesis* and *Invisible Order* (nos. 71, 72). All shown for the first time in this exhibition.



Exhibition at Betty Parsons Gallery, 1960

LIST OF EXHIBITIONS

ONE-MAN

- 1959 The Museum of Modern Art, New York, "The Artist in His Studio," photographs
- 1960 Betty Parsons Gallery, New York, paintings and sculpture
- 1962 Betty Parsons Gallery, New York, paintings and sculpture
- 1963 Betty Parsons Gallery, New York, paintings and sculpture
- 1964 Bennington College, Bennington, Vt., paintings
Betty Parsons Gallery, New York, paintings and sculpture
Robert Fraser Gallery, London, paintings and sculpture
- 1965 Galleria d'Arte, Naples, paintings and sculpture
Galleria dell'Ariete, Milan, paintings and sculpture
- 1966 The Jewish Museum, New York, sculpture
- 1967 Andre Emmerich Gallery, New York, sculpture
Betty Parsons Gallery, New York, paintings
- 1969 Andre Emmerich Gallery, New York, sculpture
Betty Parsons Gallery, New York, paintings

GROUP

- 1954 Guggenheim Museum, New York, "Younger American Painters"
- 1956 Milwaukee Art Institute, "Charles Zadok Collection"
- 1960 Helmhaus, Zurich, "Konkrete Kunst"
- 1961 Art in America Exhibition, New York
Arthur Tooth Gallery, London, "Six American Painters"
Chicago Art Institute, "Contemporary American Painters"
David Herbert Gallery, New York
The New School for Social Research, New York
- 1961-62 Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh International
- 1962 Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo
Chicago Art Institute, Annual Exhibition
The Museum of Modern Art, New York, traveling exhibition of American drawings
Tokyo Biennale exhibition
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, "Geometric Abstraction in America"
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, "Sculpture and Drawing"
World's Trade Fair, Helsinki
- 1963 Allan Stone Gallery, New York, benefit for the Foundation for the Contemporary Performance Arts
The Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C., "28th Biennial Exhibition"
de Cordova Museum, Lincoln, Mass., "New Experiments in Art"
Galerie Claude Bernard, Paris
Roswell Museum and Art Center, Roswell, New Mexico
Washington Gallery of Modern Art, Washington, D. C.
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, "1963 Annual Exhibition"
- 1963-64 Washington Gallery of Modern Art, Washington, D. C.

- 1964 Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo
 Banfer Gallery, "Sculptor's Drawings"
 Betty Parsons Gallery, New York, "Worlds Fair Artists"
 Byron Gallery, New York, "100 American Drawings"
 Galerie Denise René, Paris, "Hard Edge"
 Guggenheim Museum, New York, "American Drawings"
 Los Angeles County Museum, "Post Painterly Abstraction"
 The Museum of Modern Art, New York, "Contemporary Painters and Sculptors as Printmakers"
 Smith College, Northampton, Mass., "Sight/Sound"
 University of Michigan Museum of Art, Ann Arbor, "The New Formalists"
 Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut, "Black, White and Grey"
 World House Galleries, New York, "World House International '64"
- 1964-65 The Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C., "29th Biennial," traveling exhibition
- 1965 Detroit Institute of Arts, "Forty Key Artists of the 20th Century"
 Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Penna., "Seven Sculptors"
 The Museum of Modern Art, New York, "The Responsive Eye," traveling exhibition
 Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia
 Richard Feigen Gallery, Chicago
 United States Embassy, The Hague
 Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, "1965 Annual Exhibition"
- 1966 Betty Parsons Gallery, New York, "Pattern Art"
 Des Moines Art Center, Iowa, "Art with Optical Reaction"
 Musée Cantonal des Beaux-Arts, "2e Salon International de Galeries Pilotes Lausanne"
 Penna. State University, Hetzel Union Building Gallery, "Selected Works from the Collection of Nelson A. Rockefeller"
 Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, "American Painting"
 Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, "1966 Annual Exhibition of Sculpture and Prints"
- 1966-67 American Federation of Arts, "Inform and Interpret," traveling exhibition
 Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, "New Forms and Shapes of Color," traveling exhibition
- 1967 Institute of Contemporary Art, Univ. of Penna., "Art for the City"
 Los Angeles County Museum of Art and Philadelphia Museum of Art, "American Sculpture of the Sixties"
 The Museum of Modern Art, New York, "The 1960's: Painting and Sculpture from the Museum Collection"
 New York City Office of Cultural Affairs, "Sculpture in Environment"
 University of Illinois, Urbana, "Contemporary American Painting and Sculpture"
 Washington Gallery of Modern Art organized, "Art for Embassies"
 Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, "1967 Annual Exhibition"
- 1967-68 Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, Conn.
 Camden Arts Center and United States Embassy, London, "Transatlantic Graphics," traveling exhibition
- 1968 Cleveland Museum of Art, "Outdoor Garden Court Sculpture"
 HemisFair '68, San Antonio, Texas

Museum of Modern Art, Belgrade, "British and American Graphics," traveling exhibition in Yugoslavia

The Museum of Modern Art, New York, "The Art of the Real: 1948-1968," traveling exhibition

R. S. Reynolds Company, Memorial Awards, "Visions of Man"

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, "1968 Annual Exhibition of Contemporary American Sculpture"

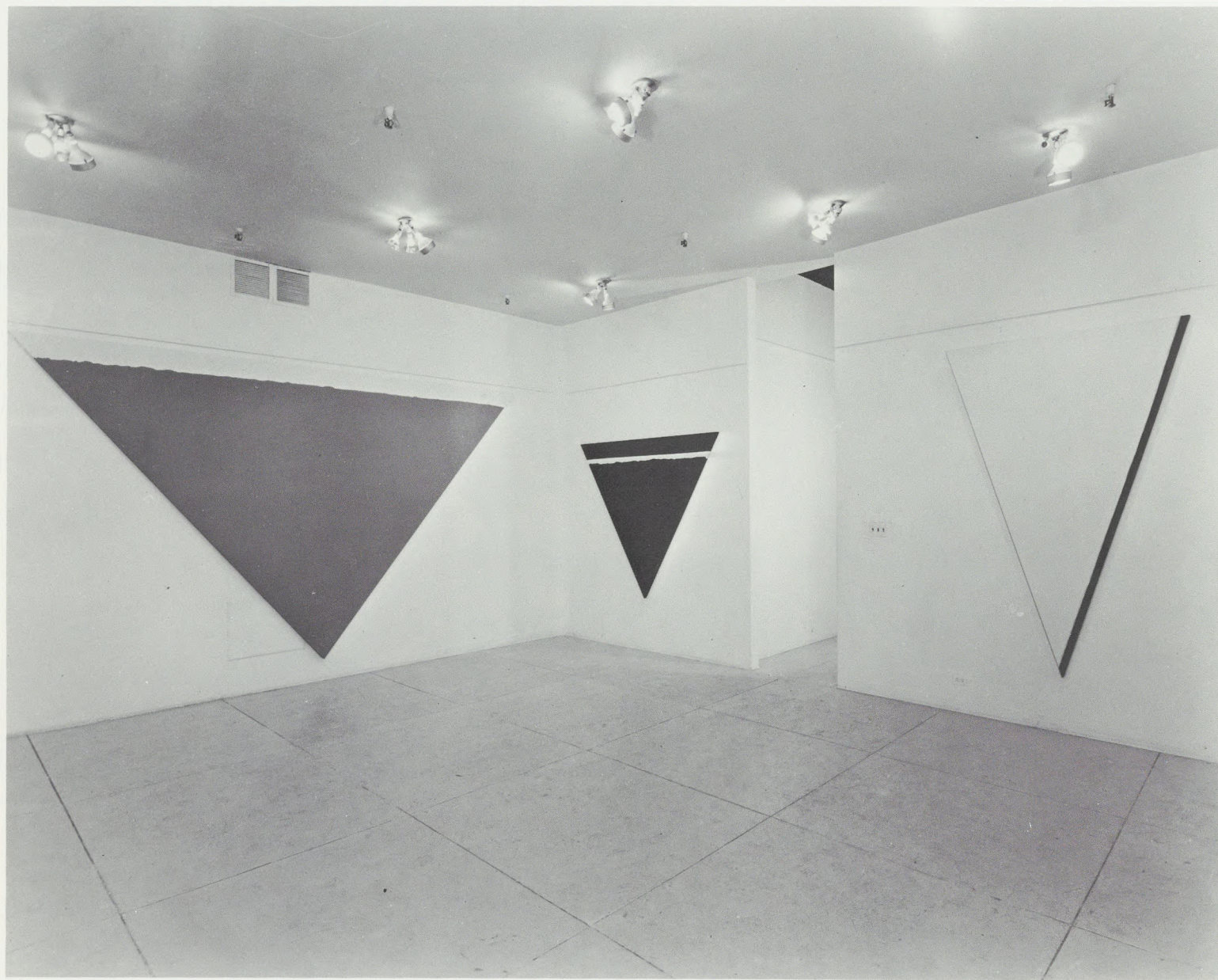
1969

The Museum of Modern Art, New York, "The New American Painting and Sculpture: The First Generation"

Philadelphia Museum of Art, "The Pure and Clear in American Art"



Exhibition at Andre Emmerich Gallery, 1967



Exhibition at Betty Parsons Gallery, 1969

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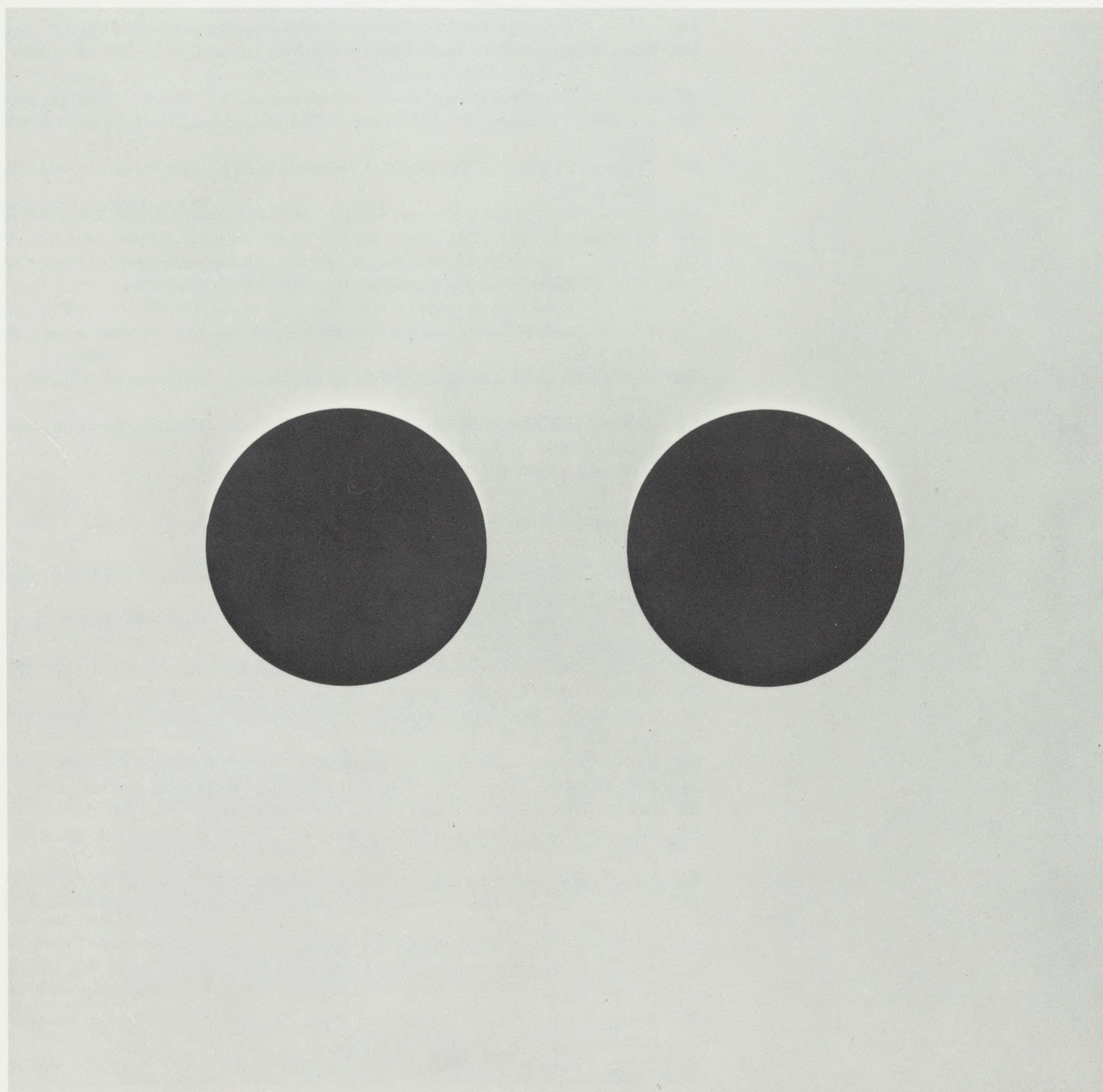
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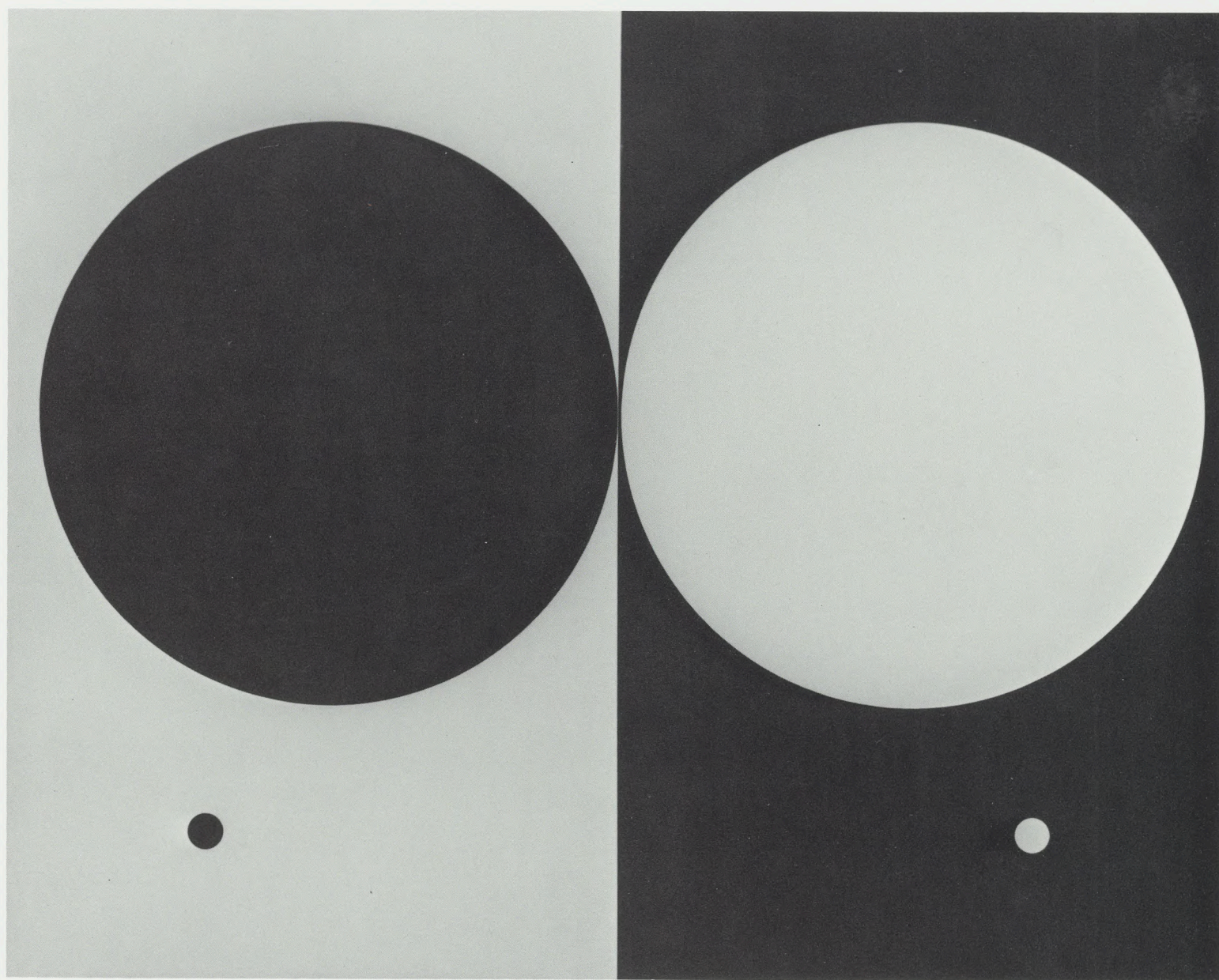
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GENERAL

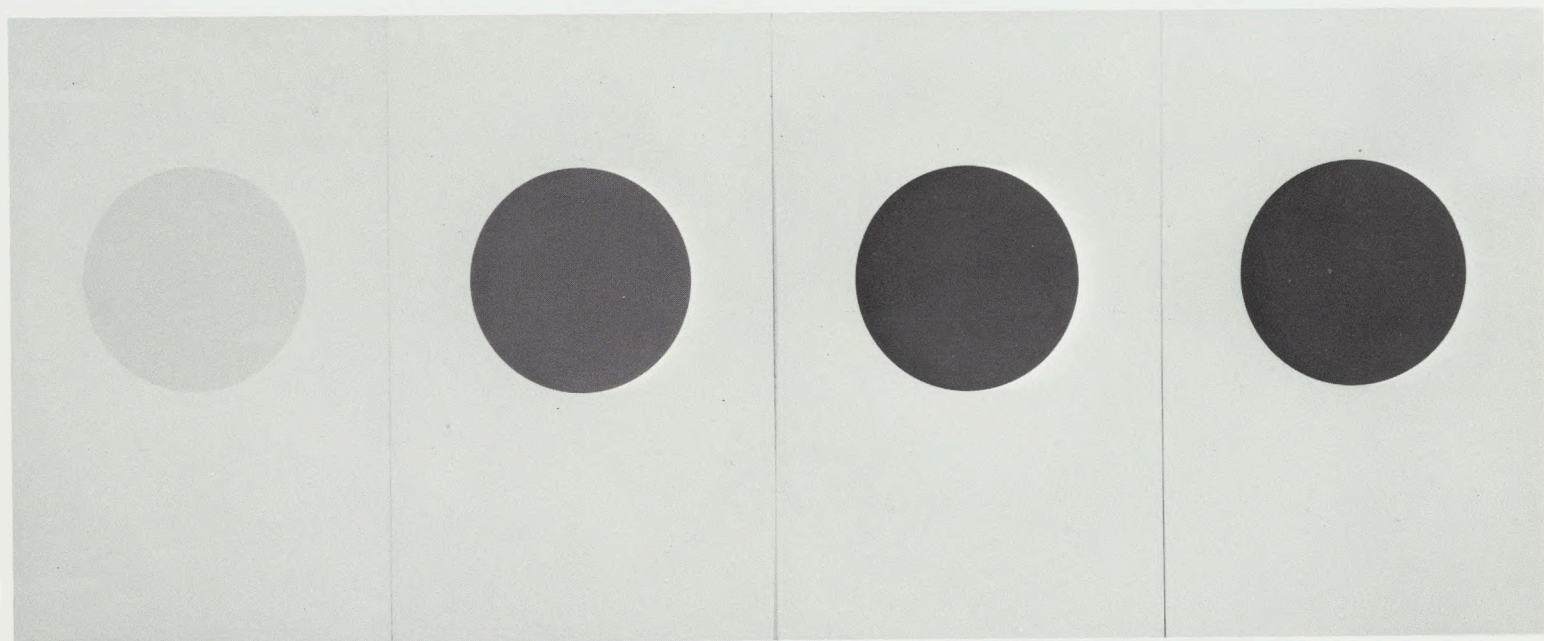
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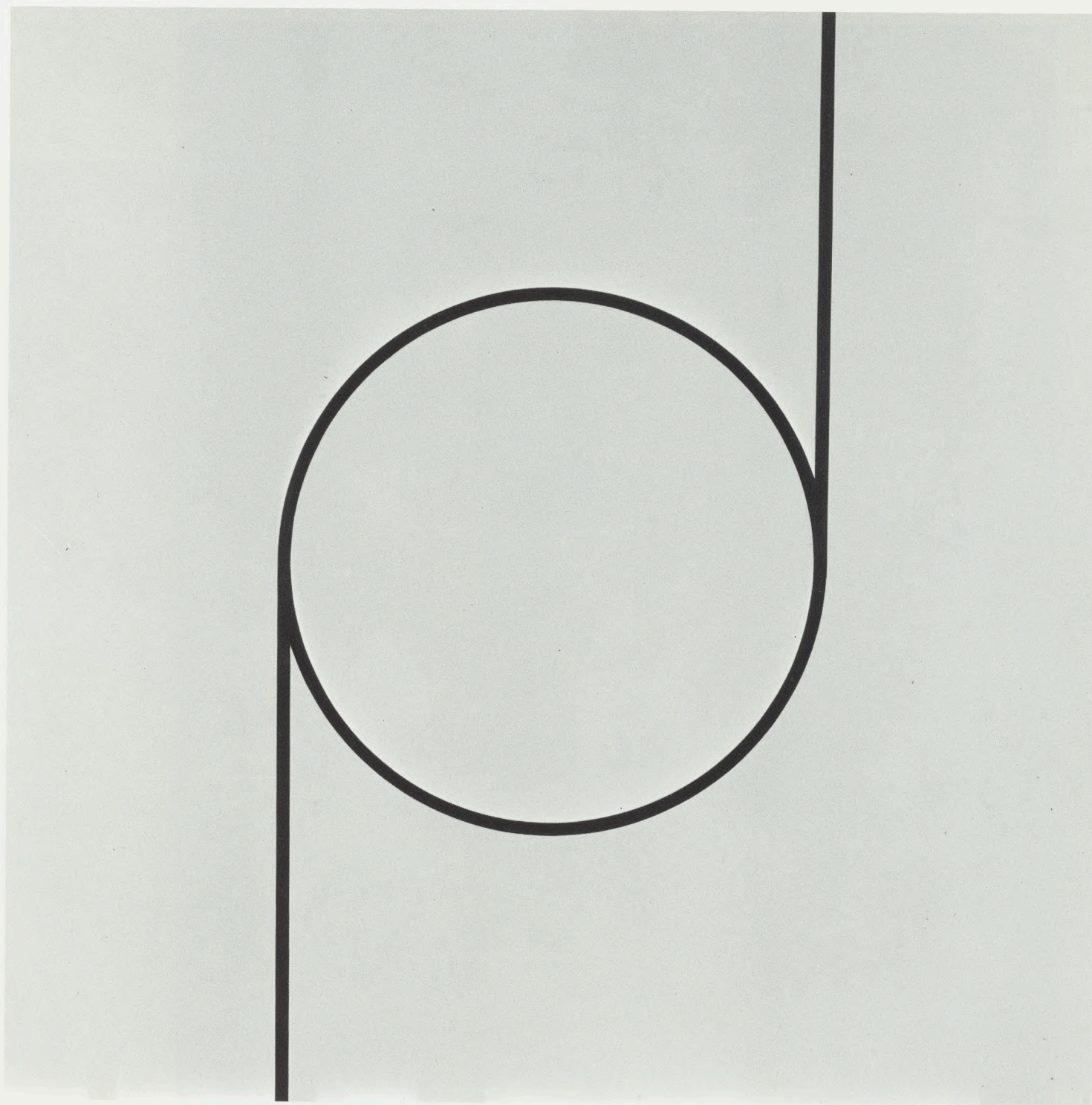
2. TWO CIRCLES, 1950



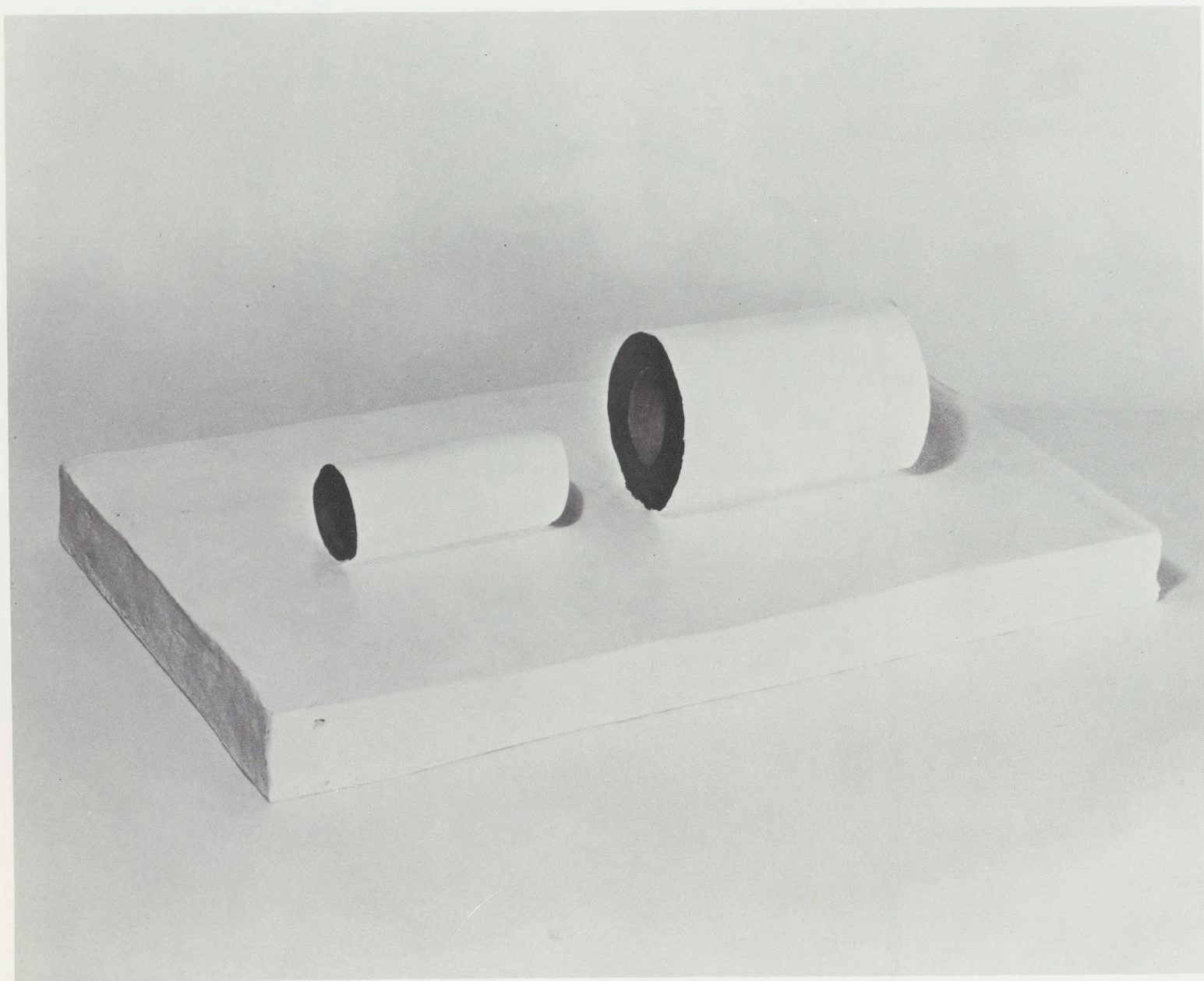
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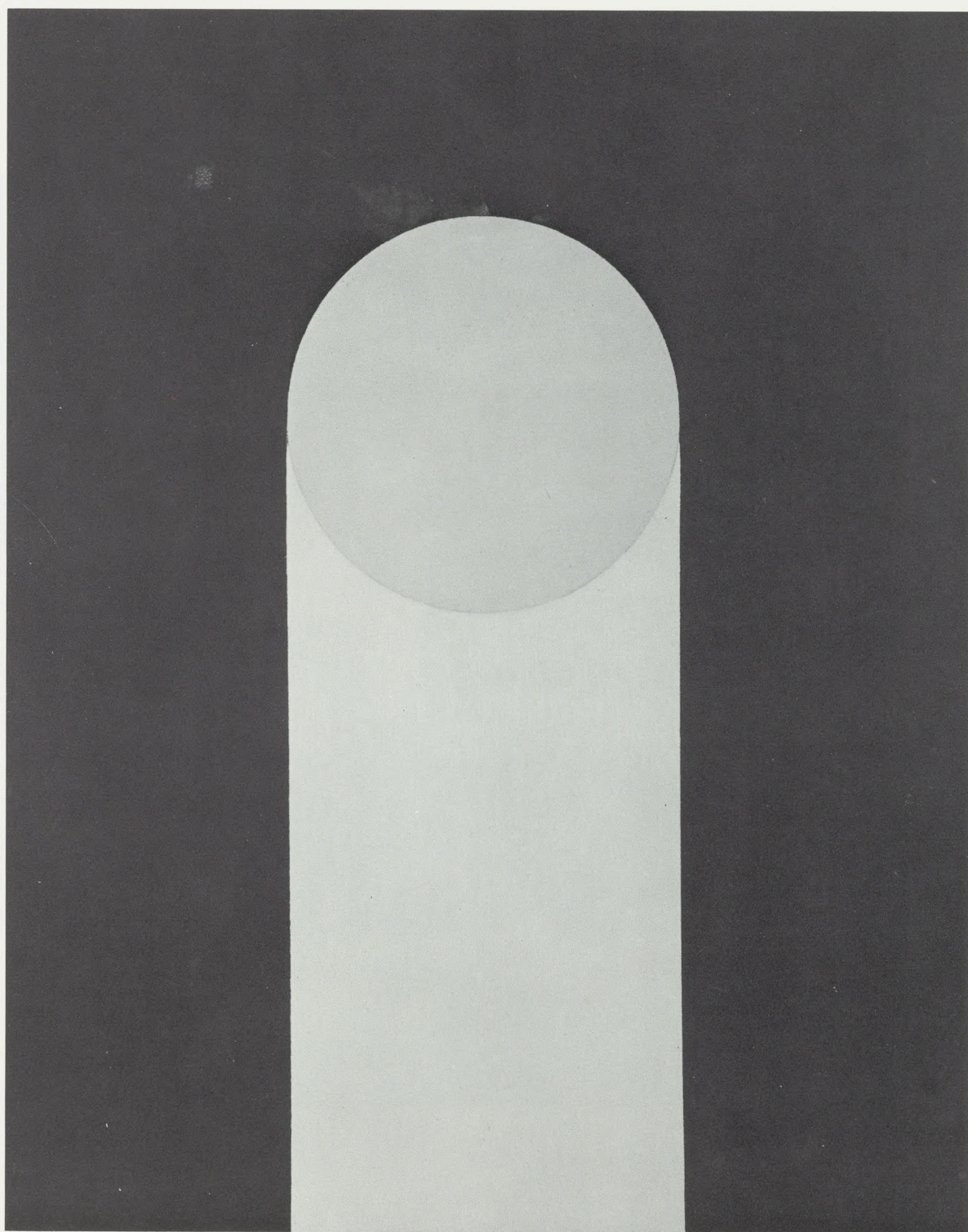
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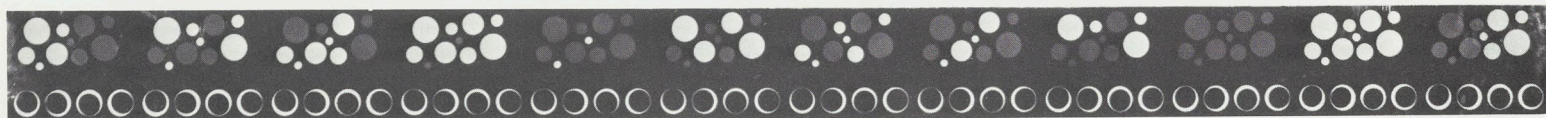
9. TRAJECTORIES, 1952



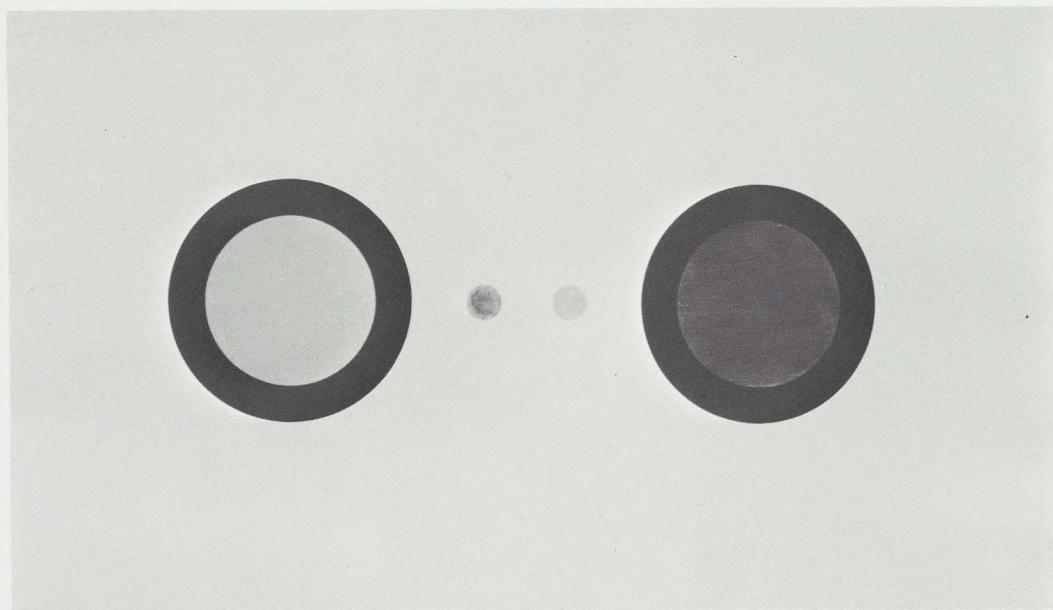
74. UNTITLED, 1952



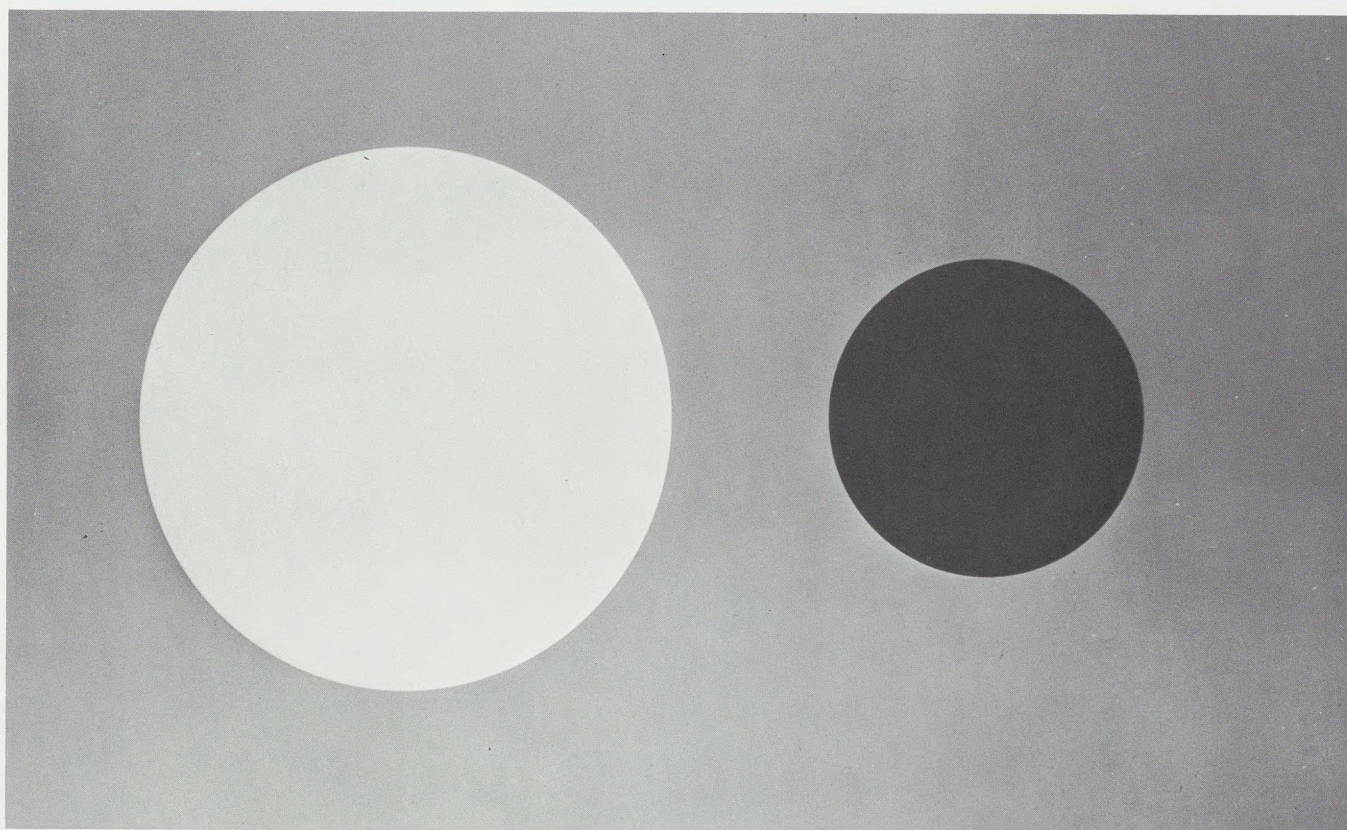
8. CIRCLE PATH, 1952



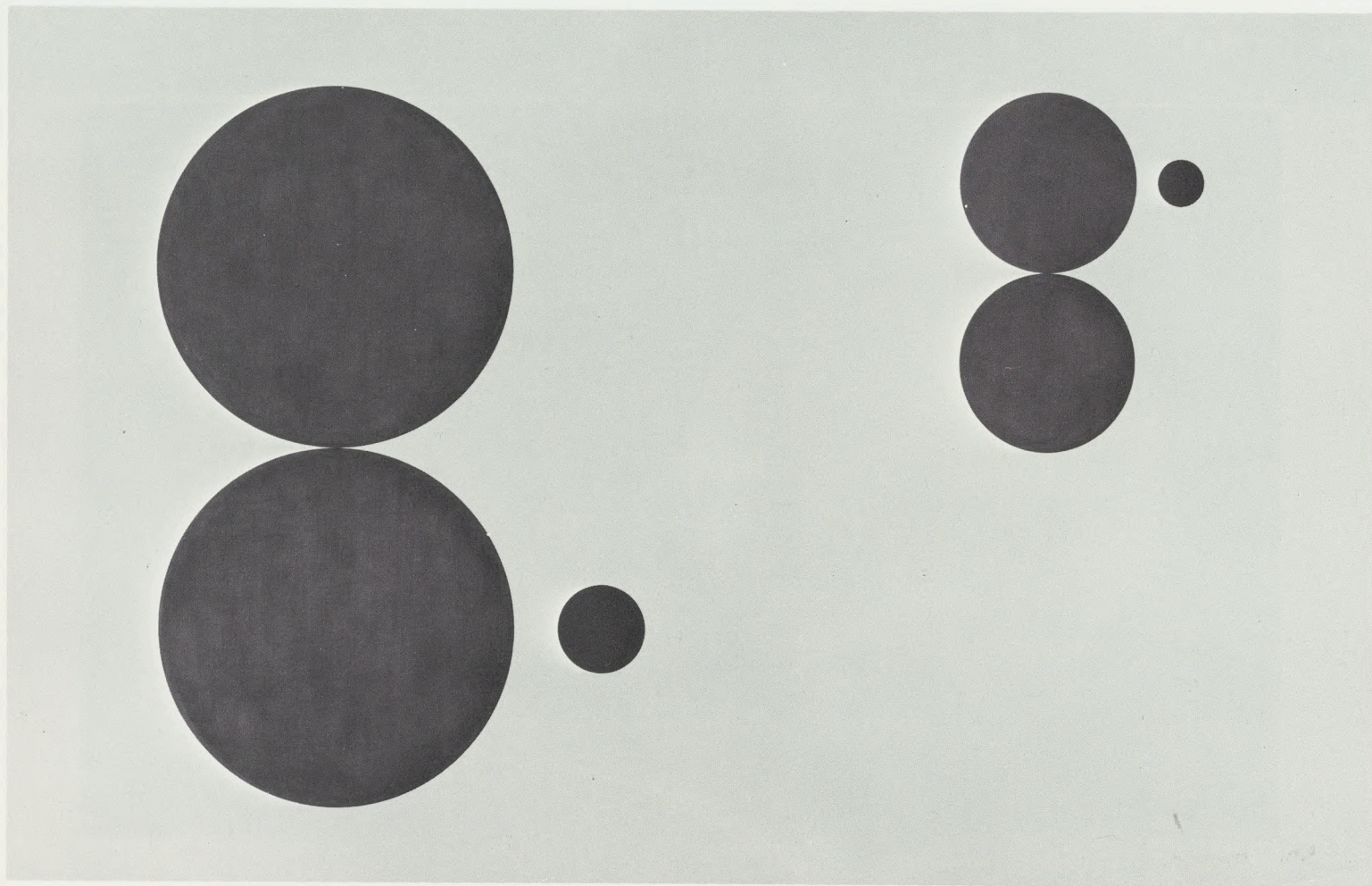
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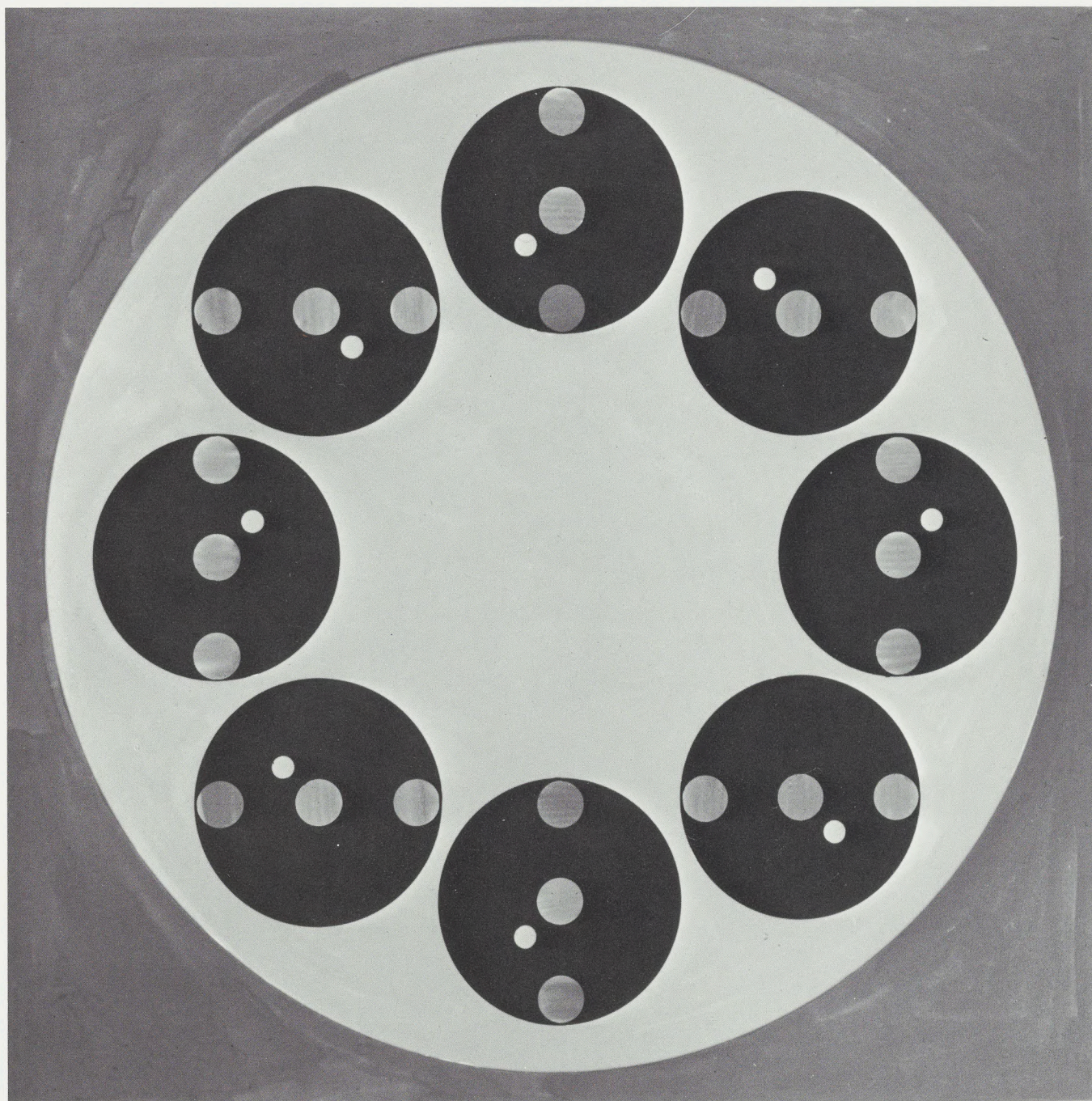
16. EXCHANGE, 1952



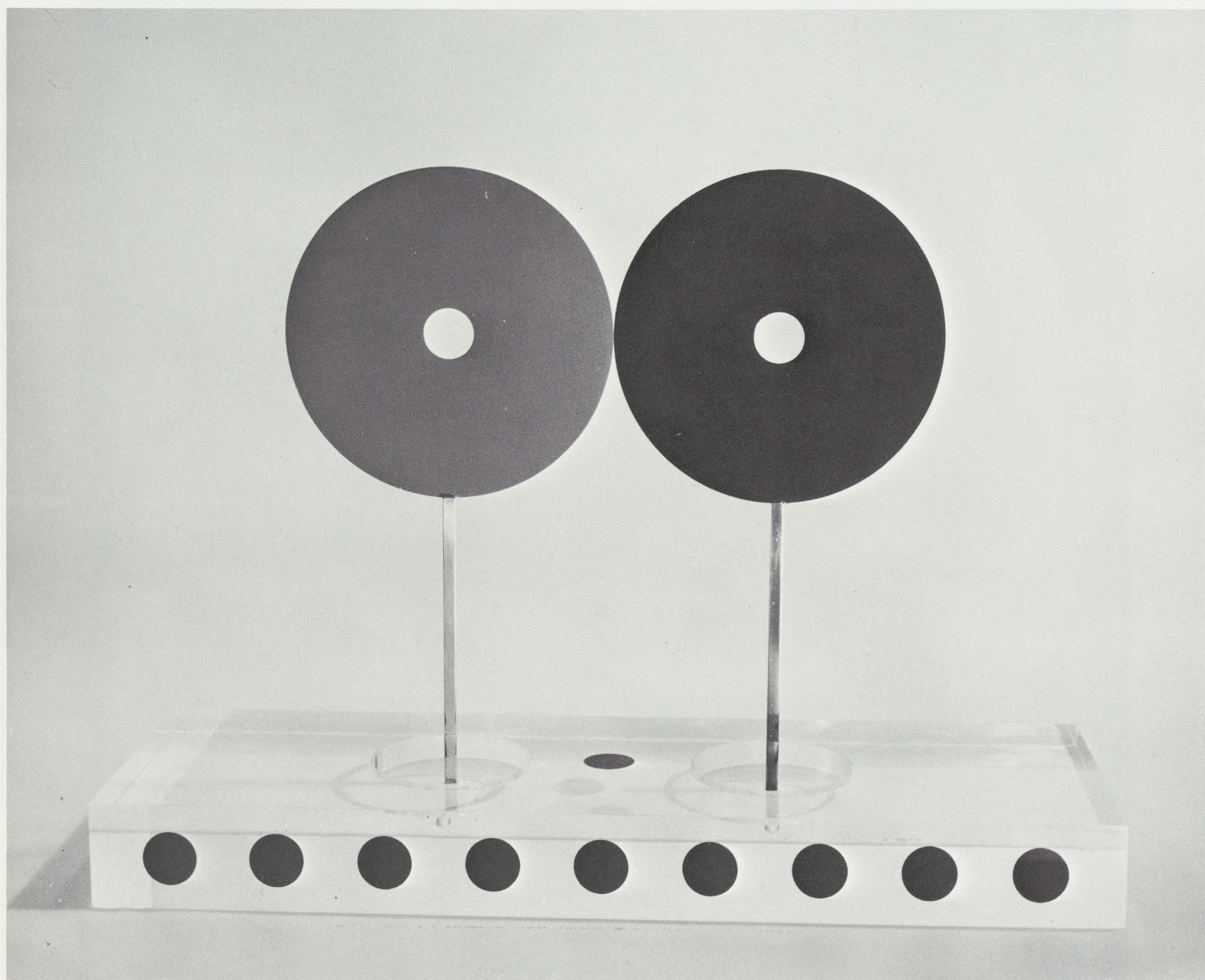
11. WHITE DOMINANT, 1952 [repainted 1959]

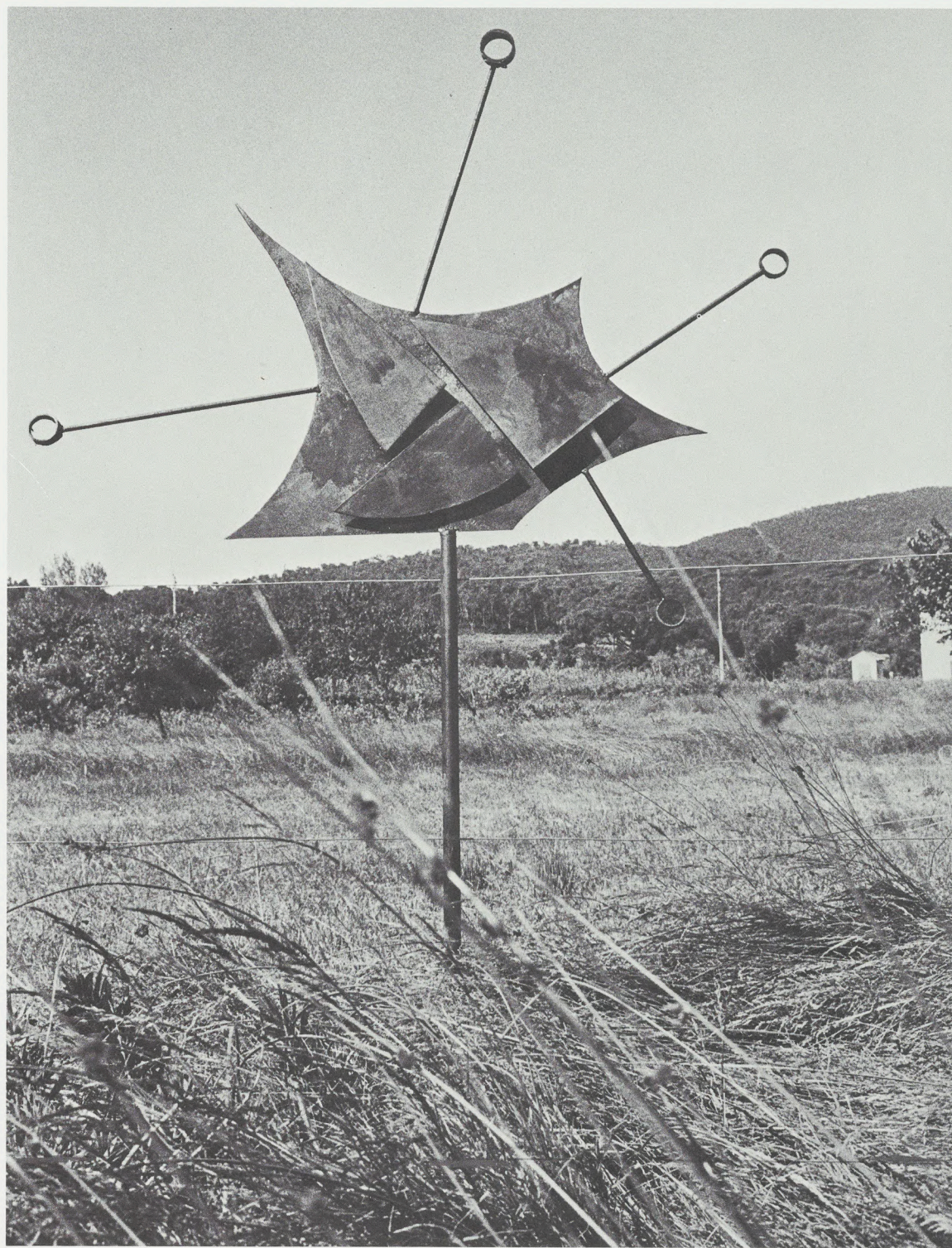


18. AFTER-IMAGE, 1954 [repainted 1959]

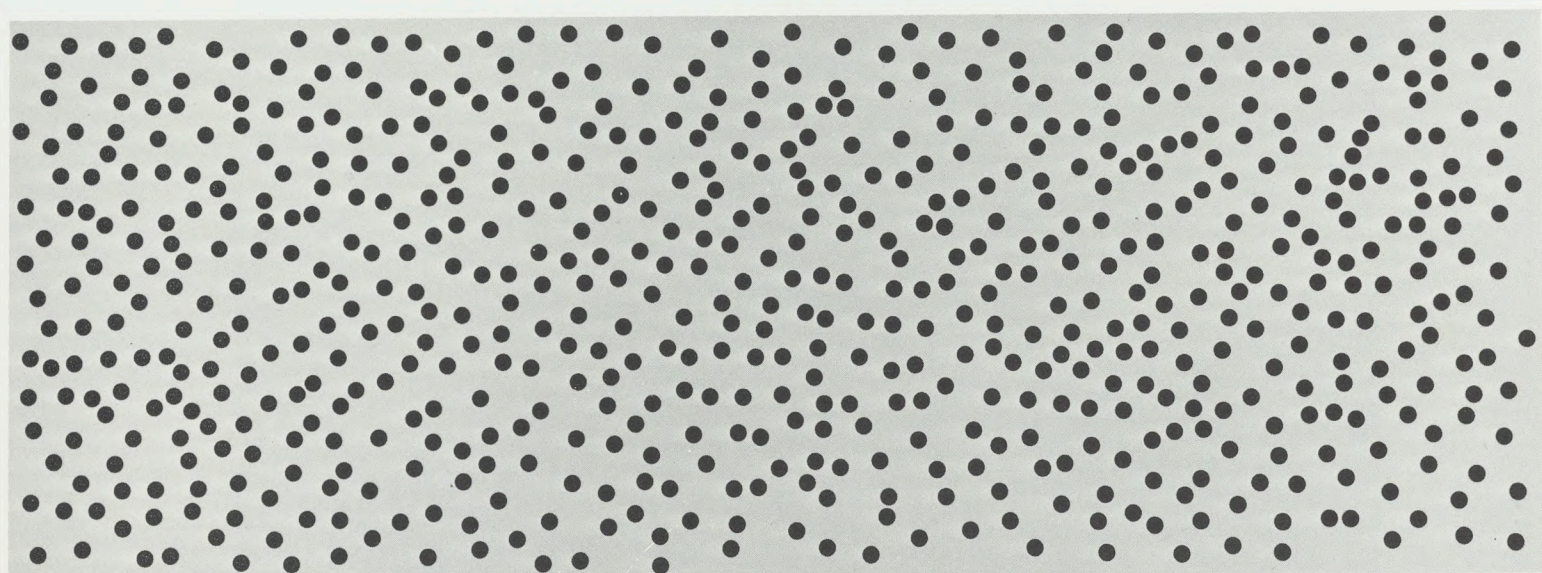


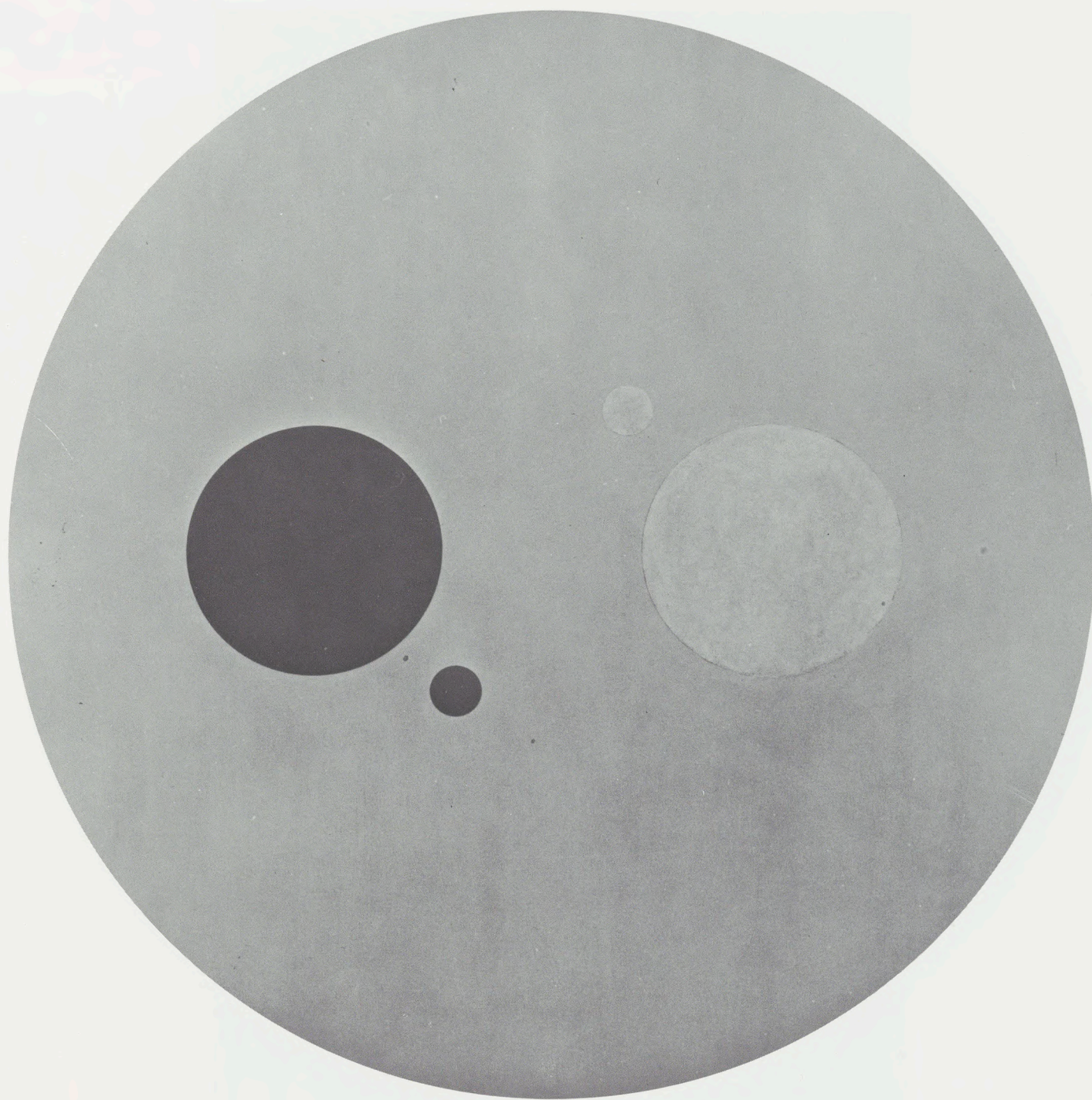
19. ROTATING, 1955-56





78. UNTITLED, 1959

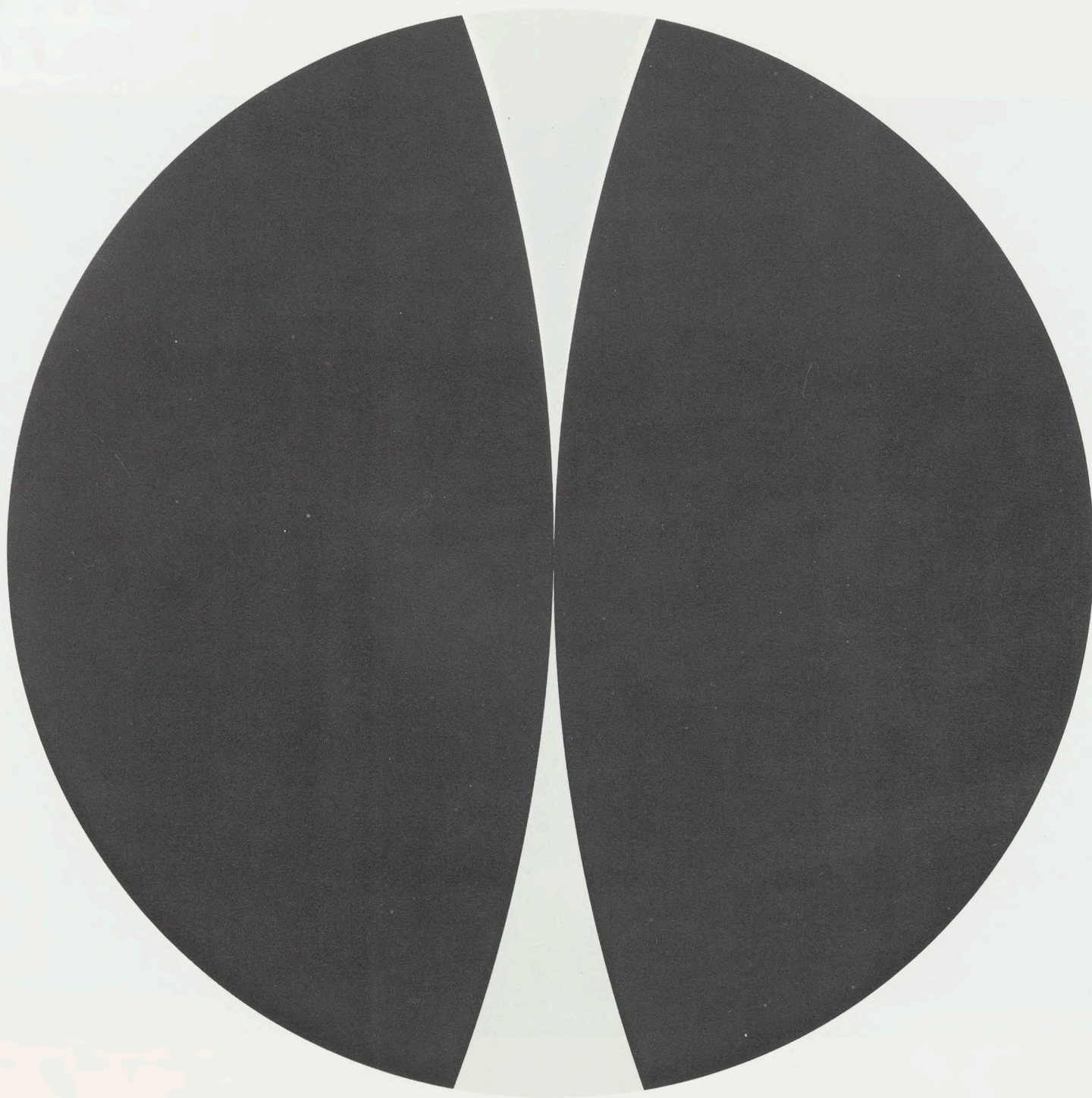




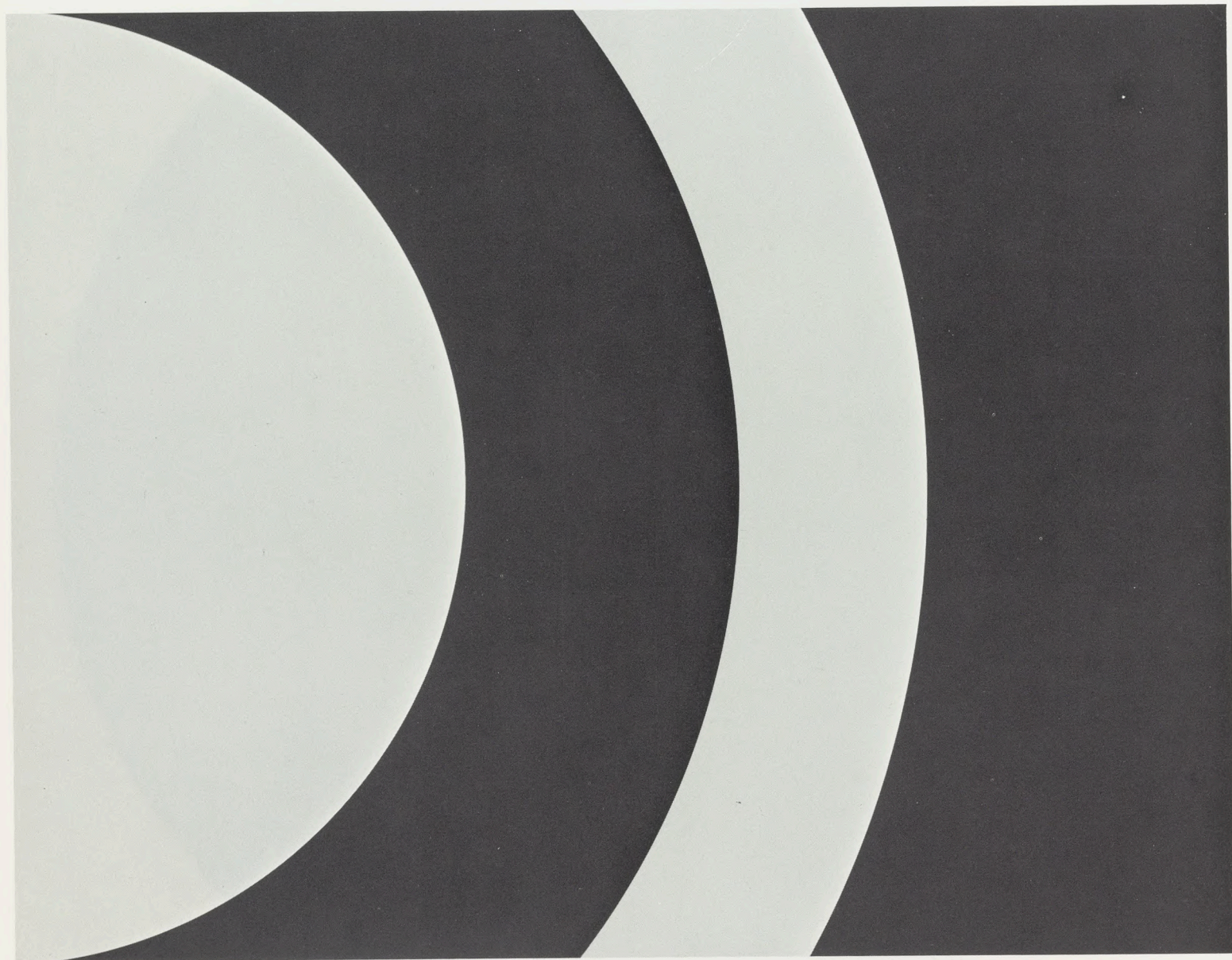
26. CONTINUOUS ON RED, 1960

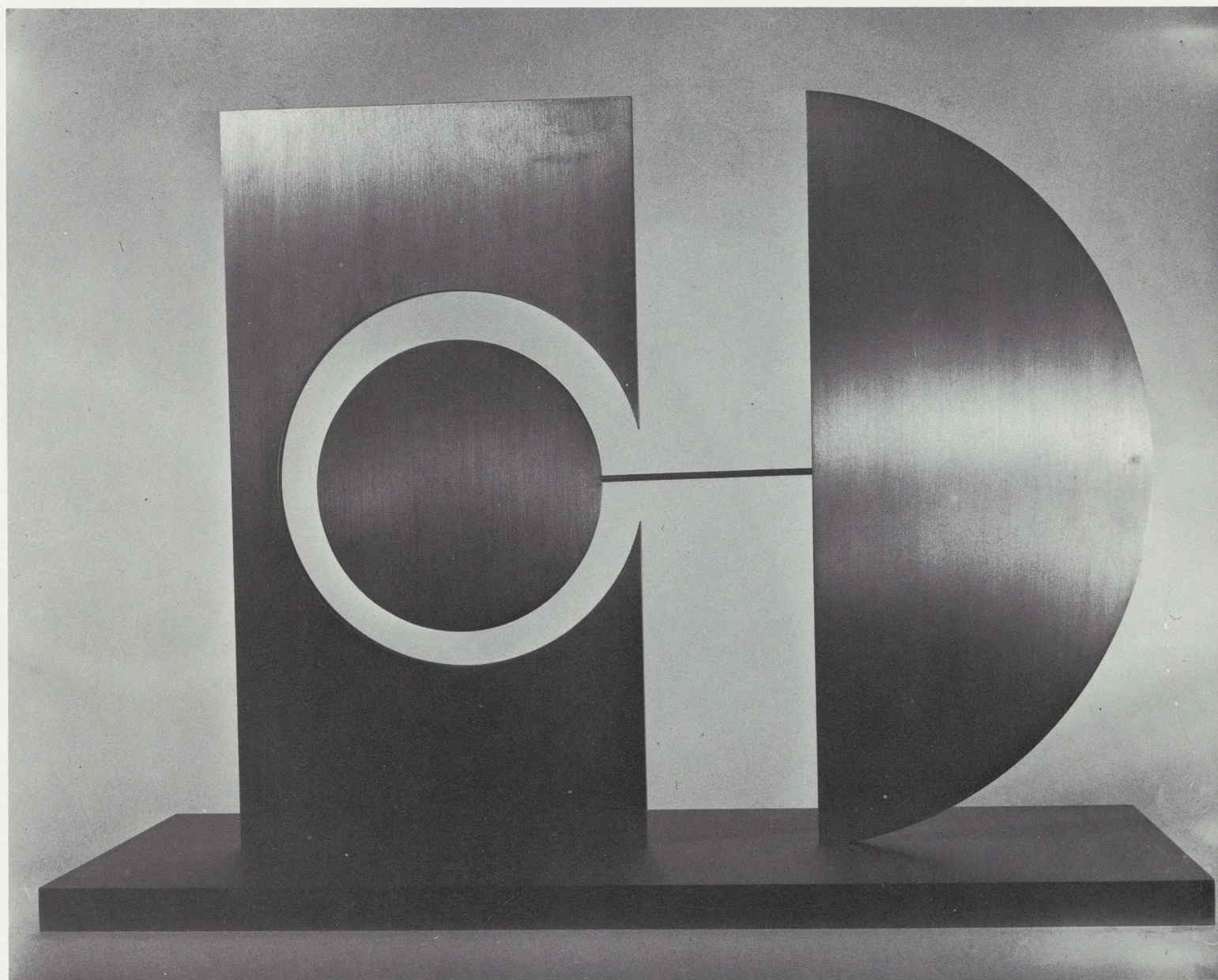


80. SIGMA I, 1961

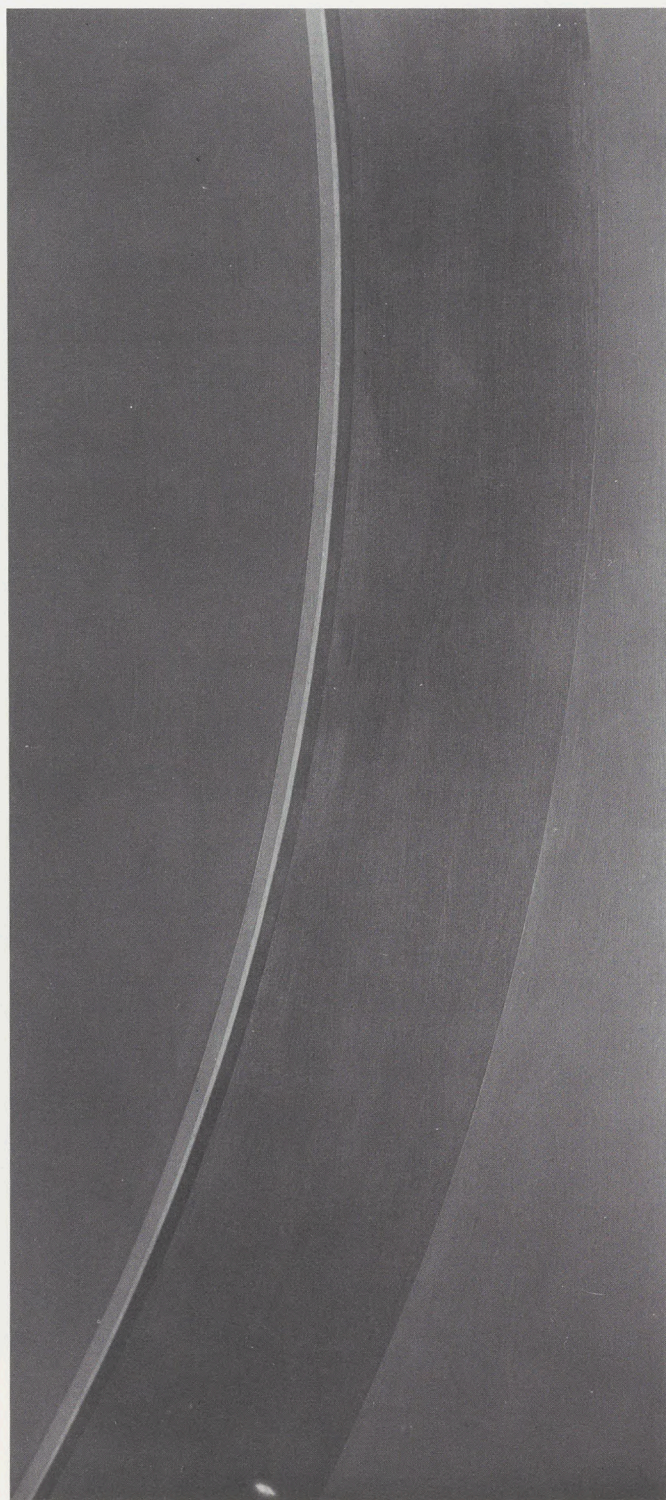


33. OMICRON II, 1961 [repainted 1969]

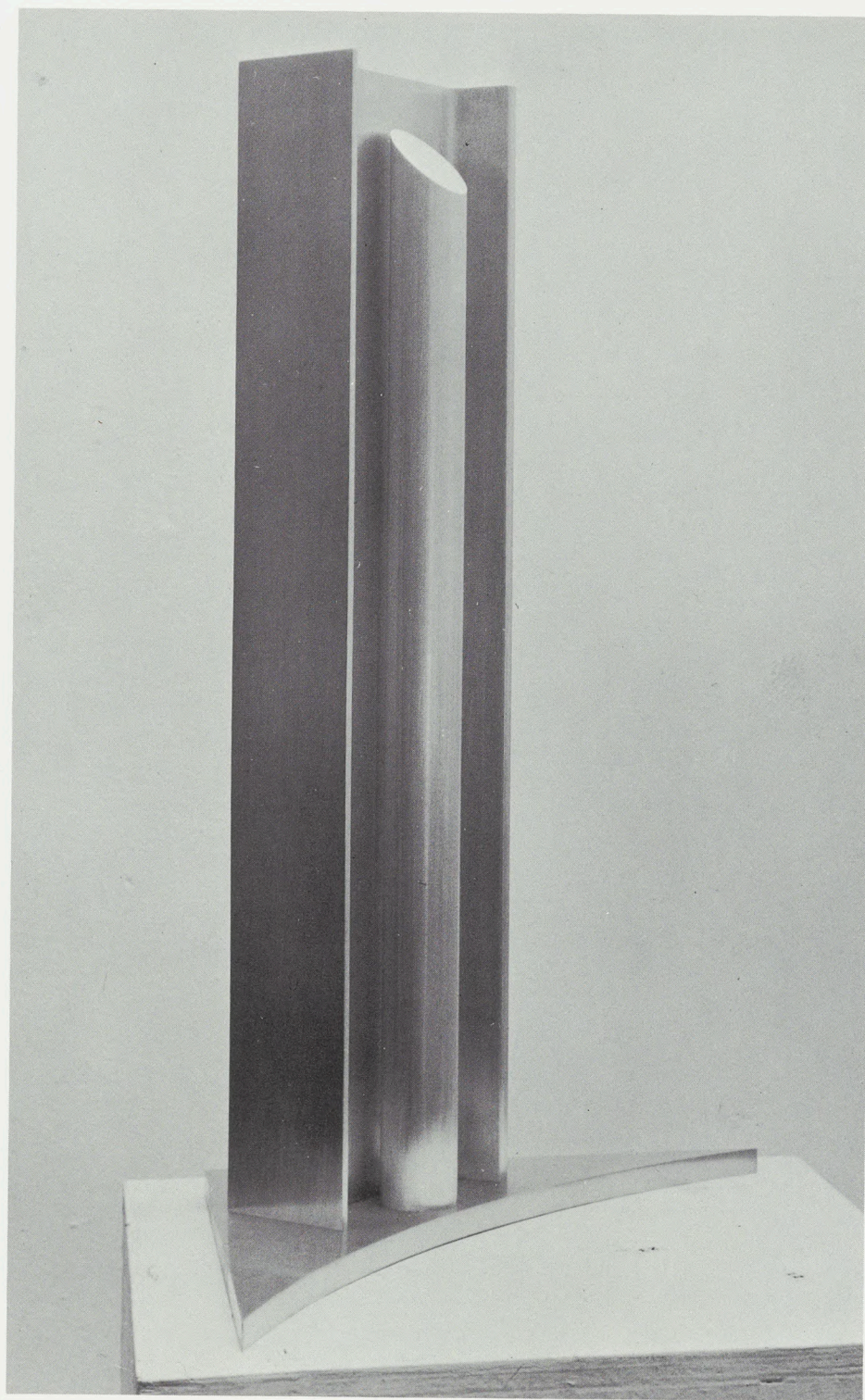




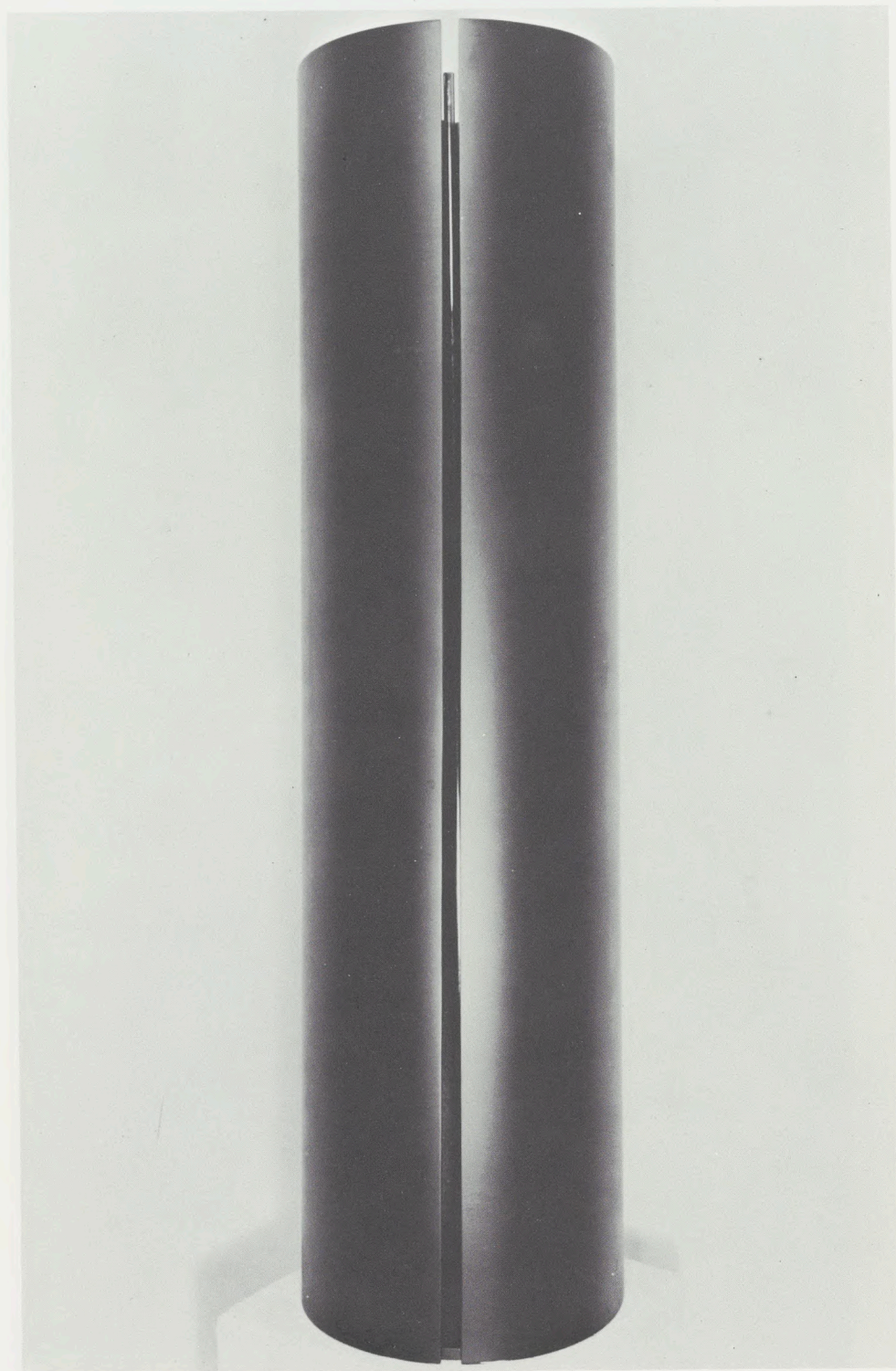
81. CLYTEMNESTRA, 1962



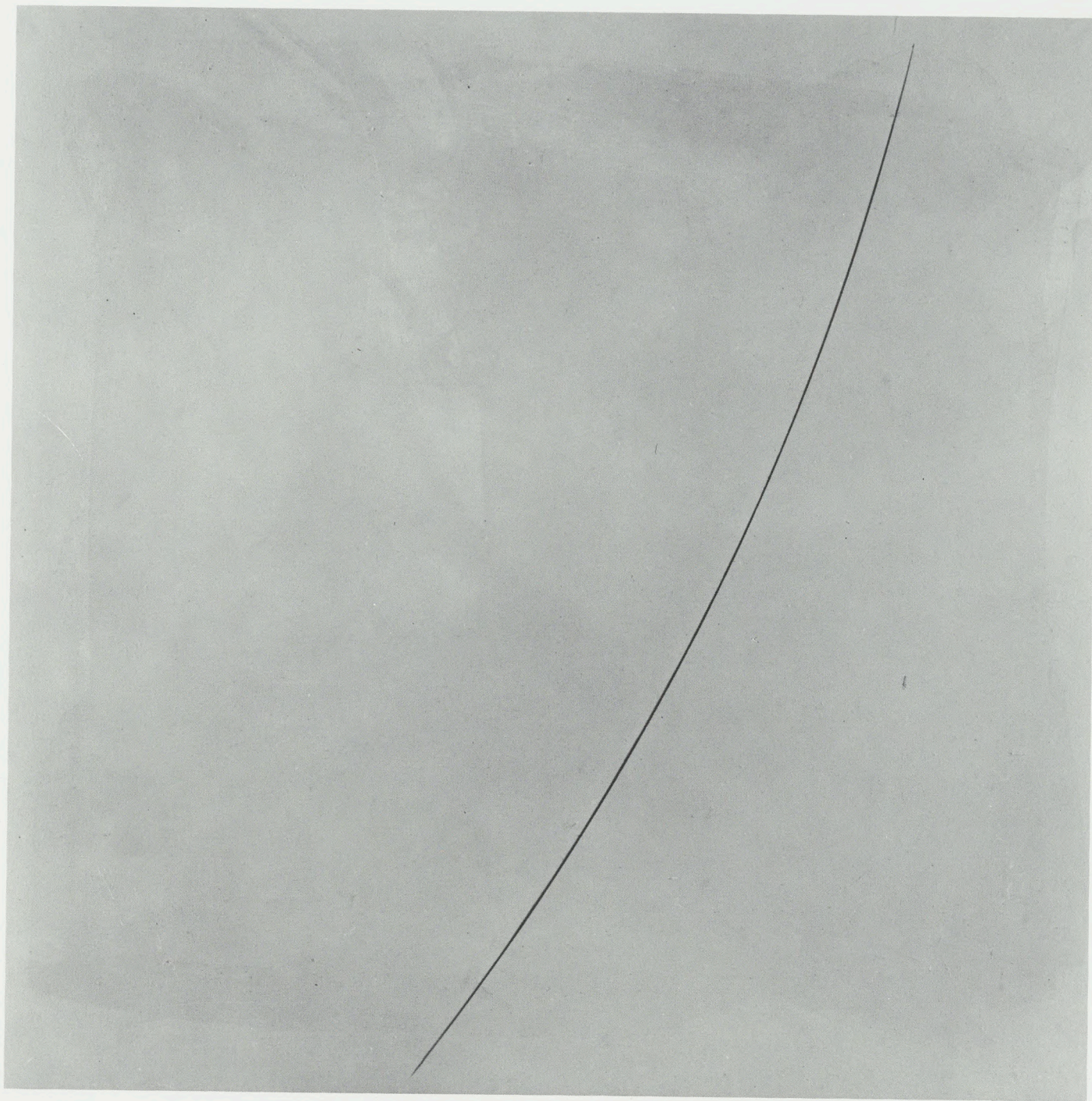
35. THE GREAT MYSTERIES III, 1962



84. UNTITLED, 1963



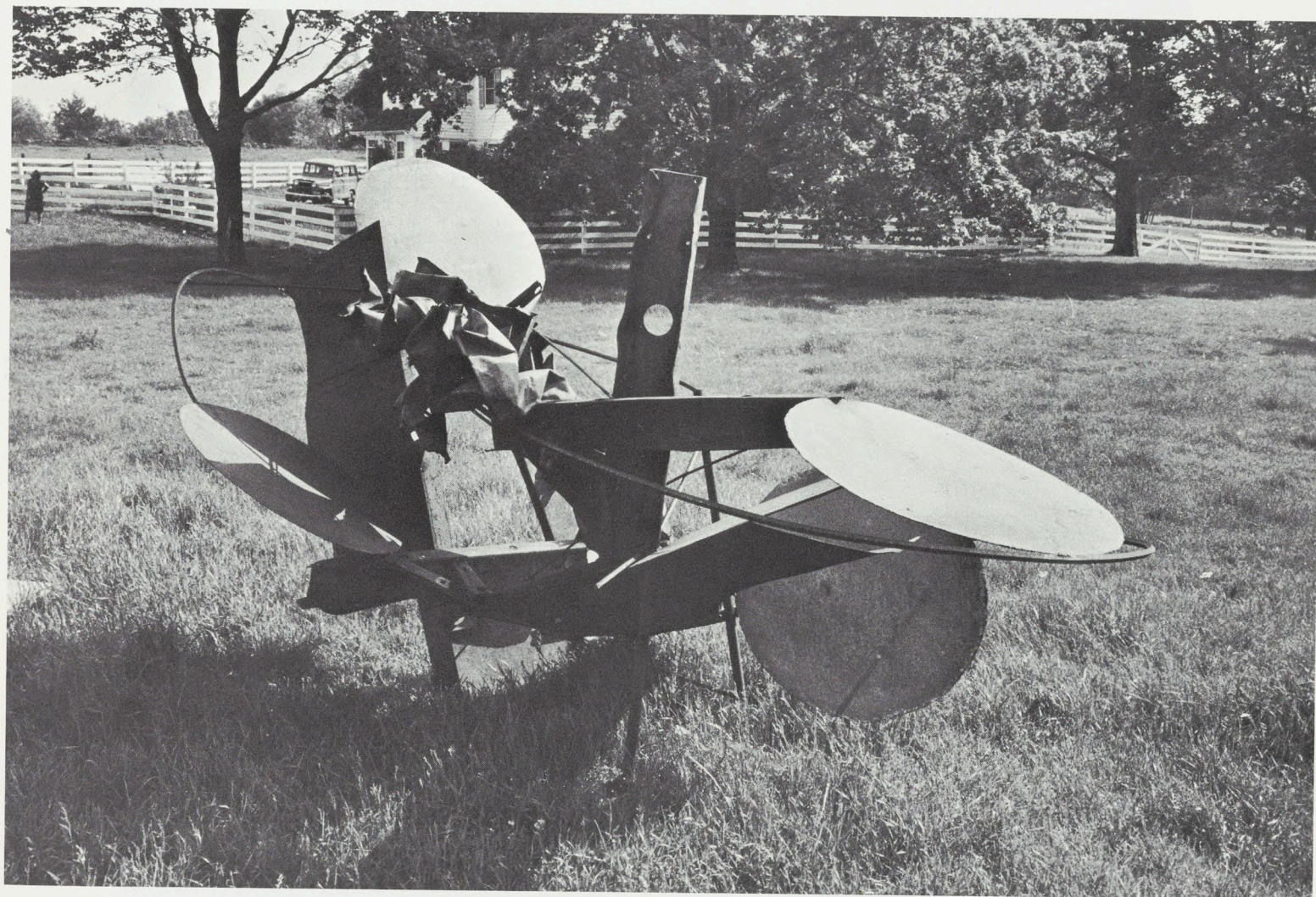
89. THE BLACK RIDDLE, 1963



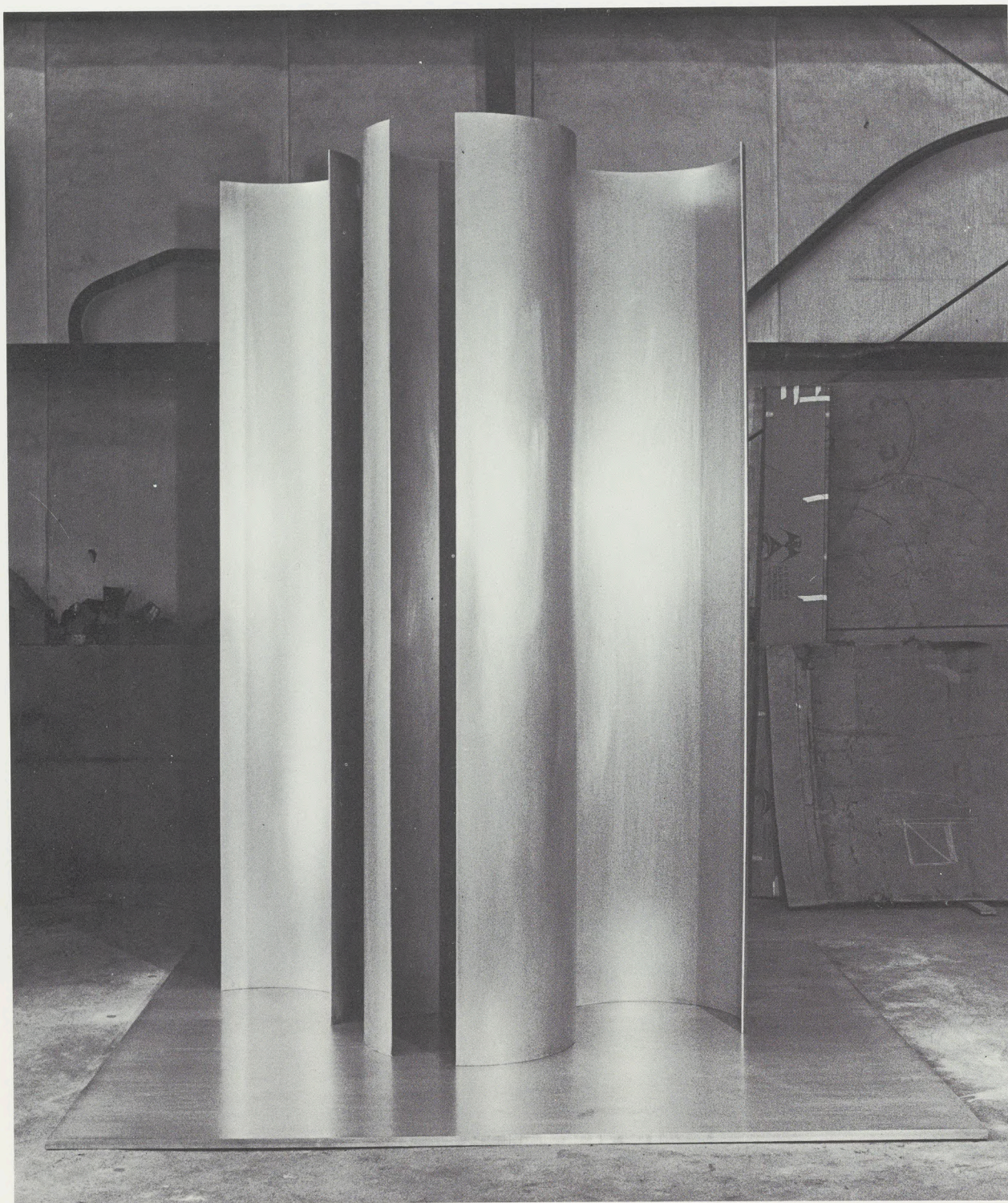
40. INACCESSIBLE, 1963



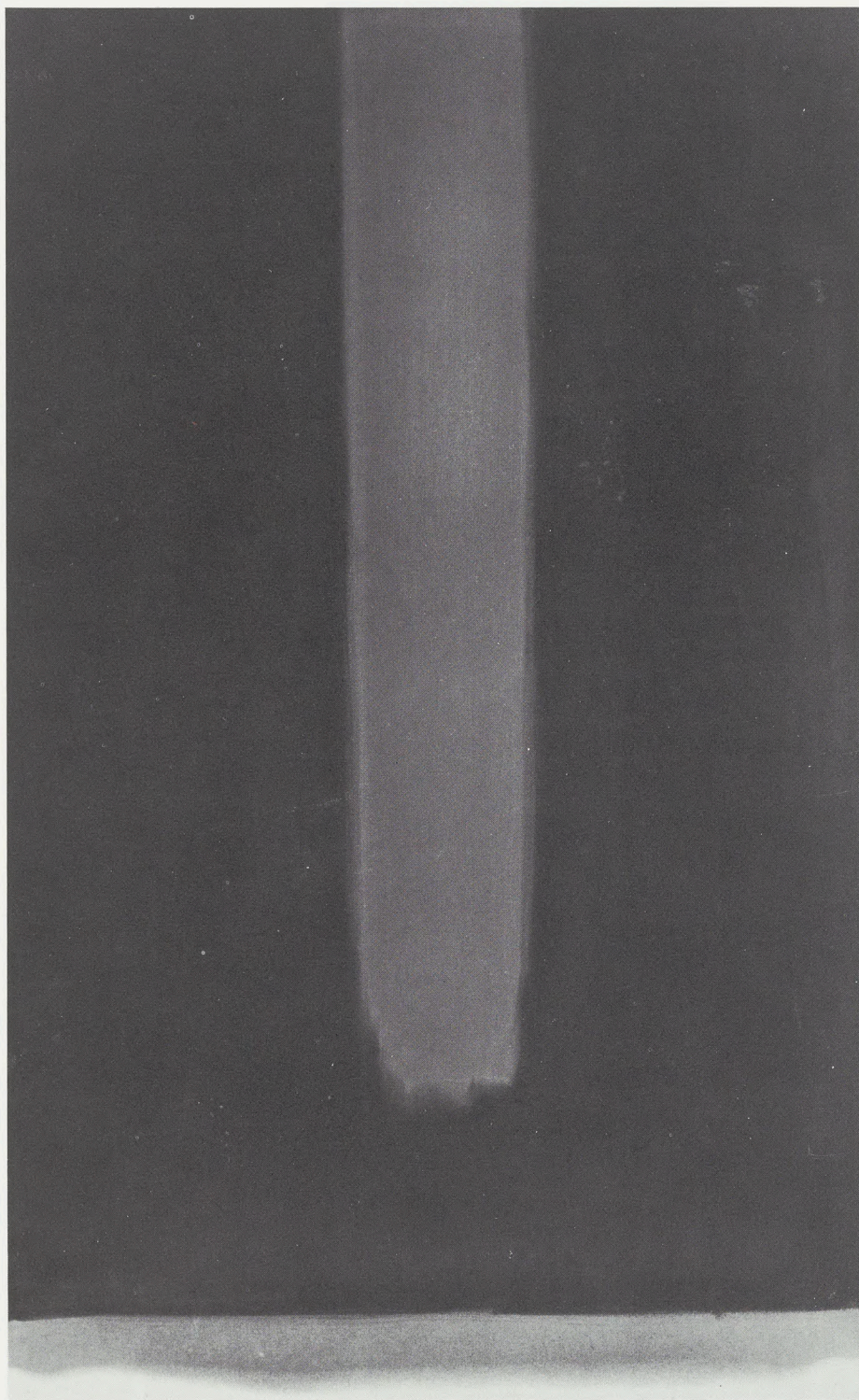
45. RAW END, 1963



87. UNTITLED, 1963



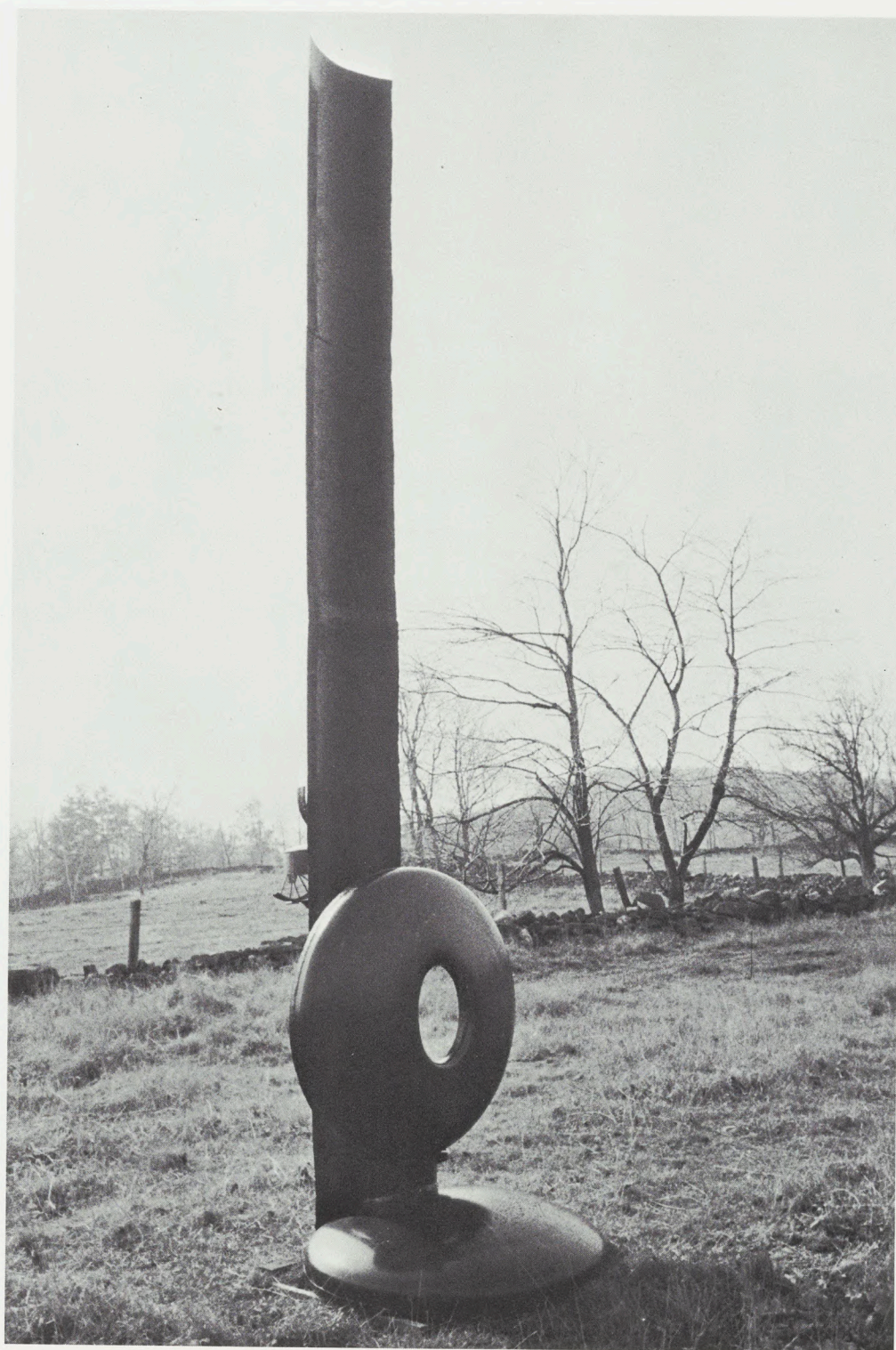
112. TEMPLE III, 1970 [begun 1964]



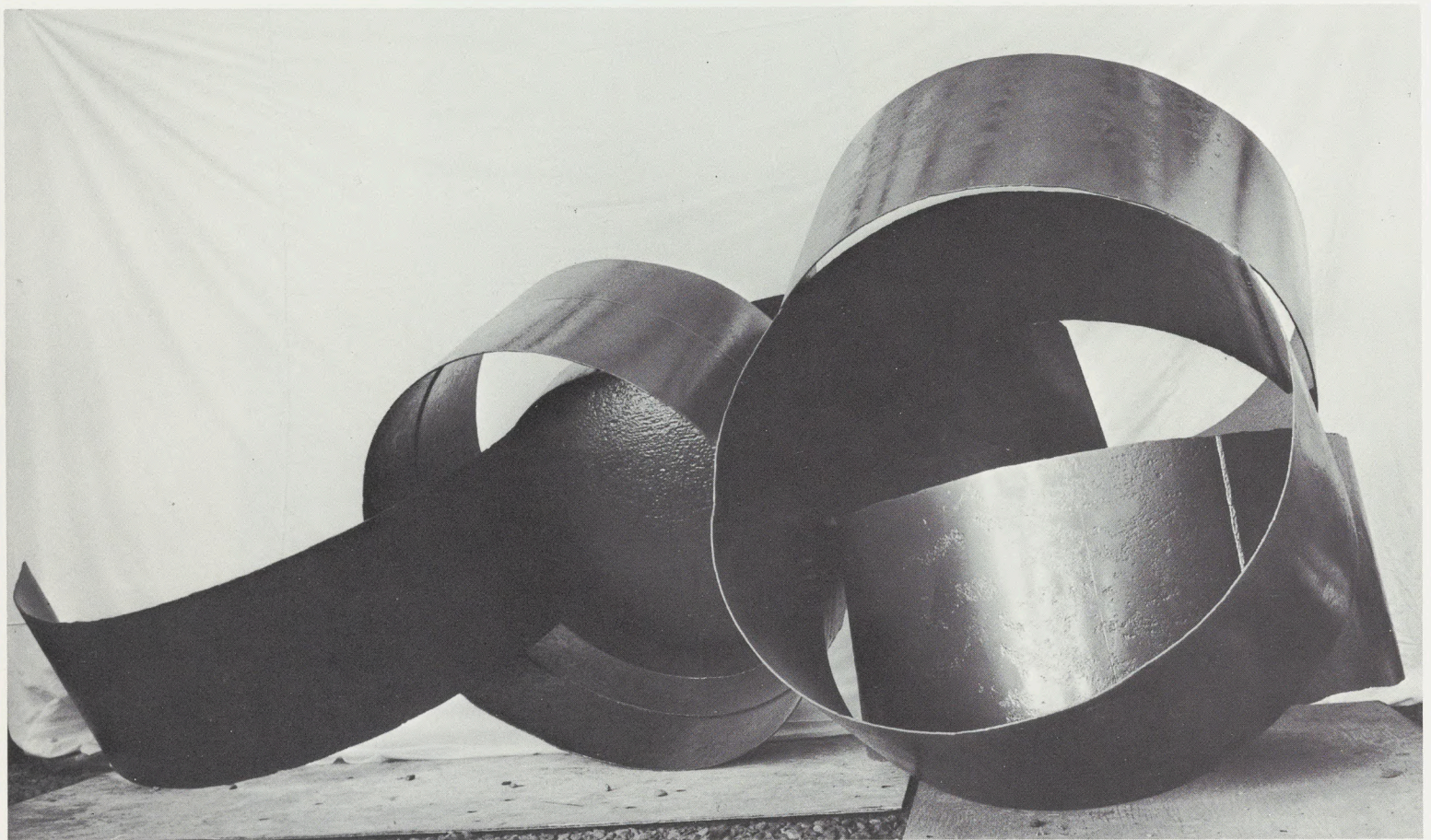
53. MONAD, 1966



58. ON HIGH, 1967



94. RITUAL II, 1966

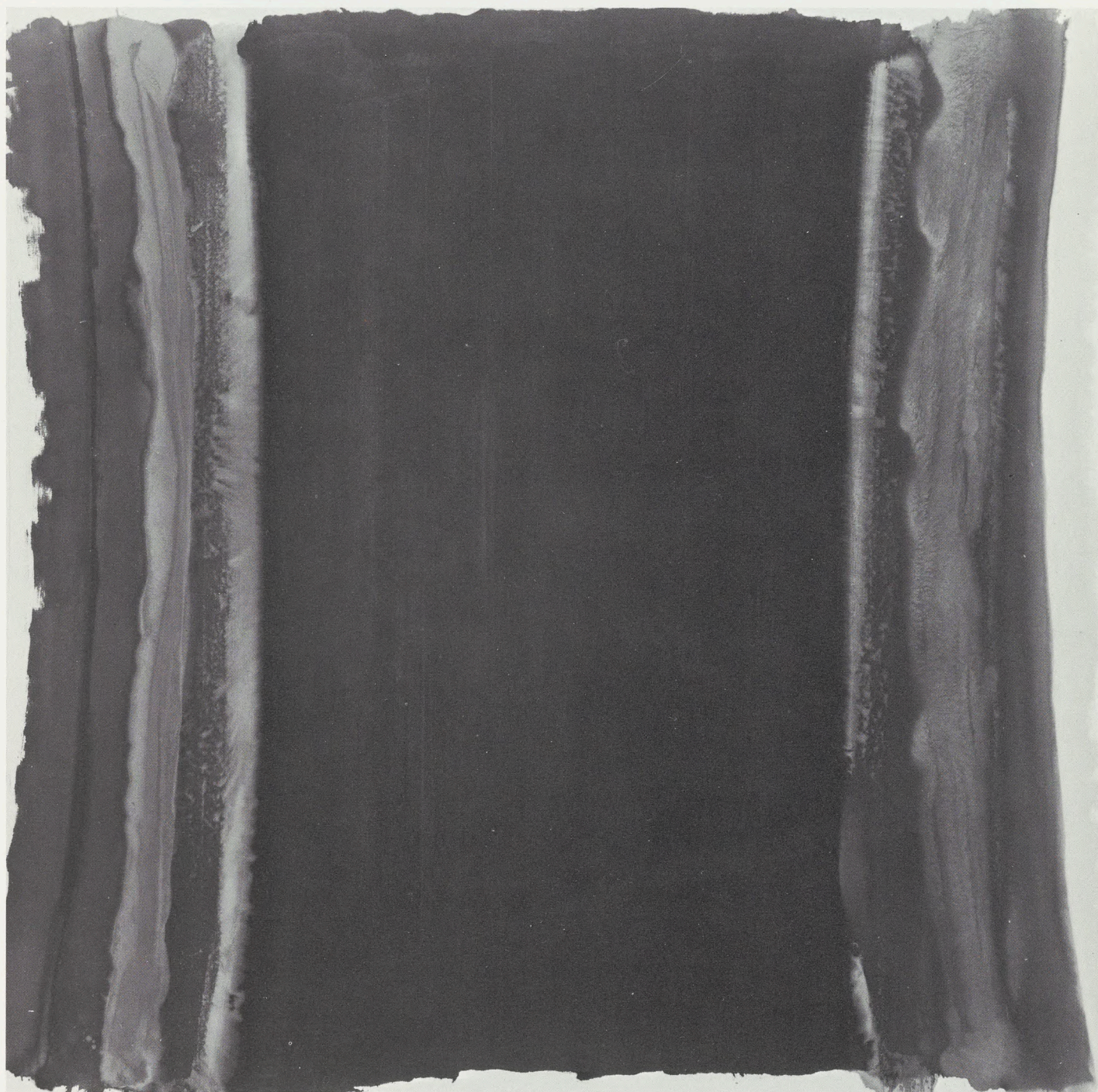


96. AROUND, 1966

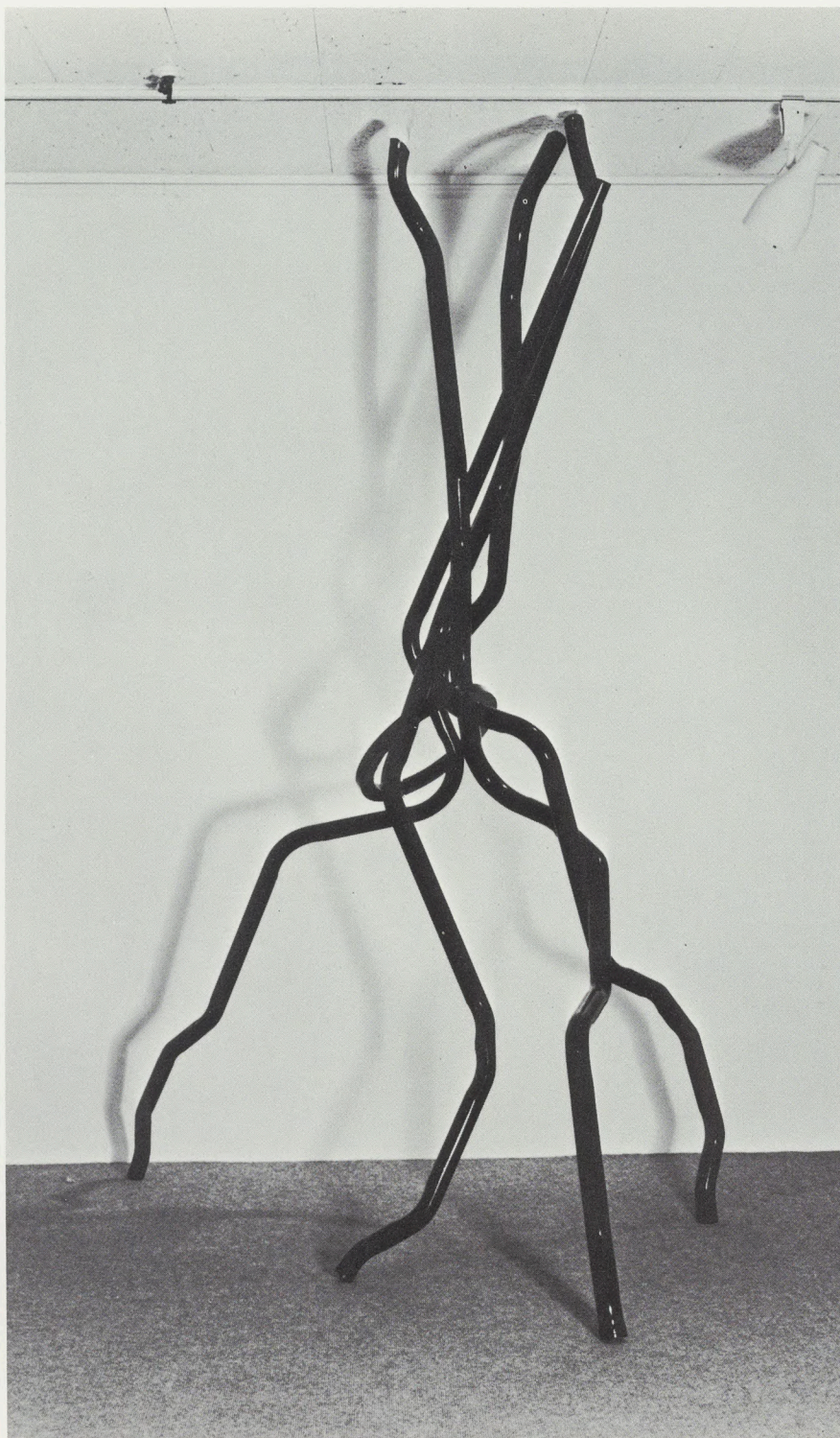


62. ORB IX, 1967

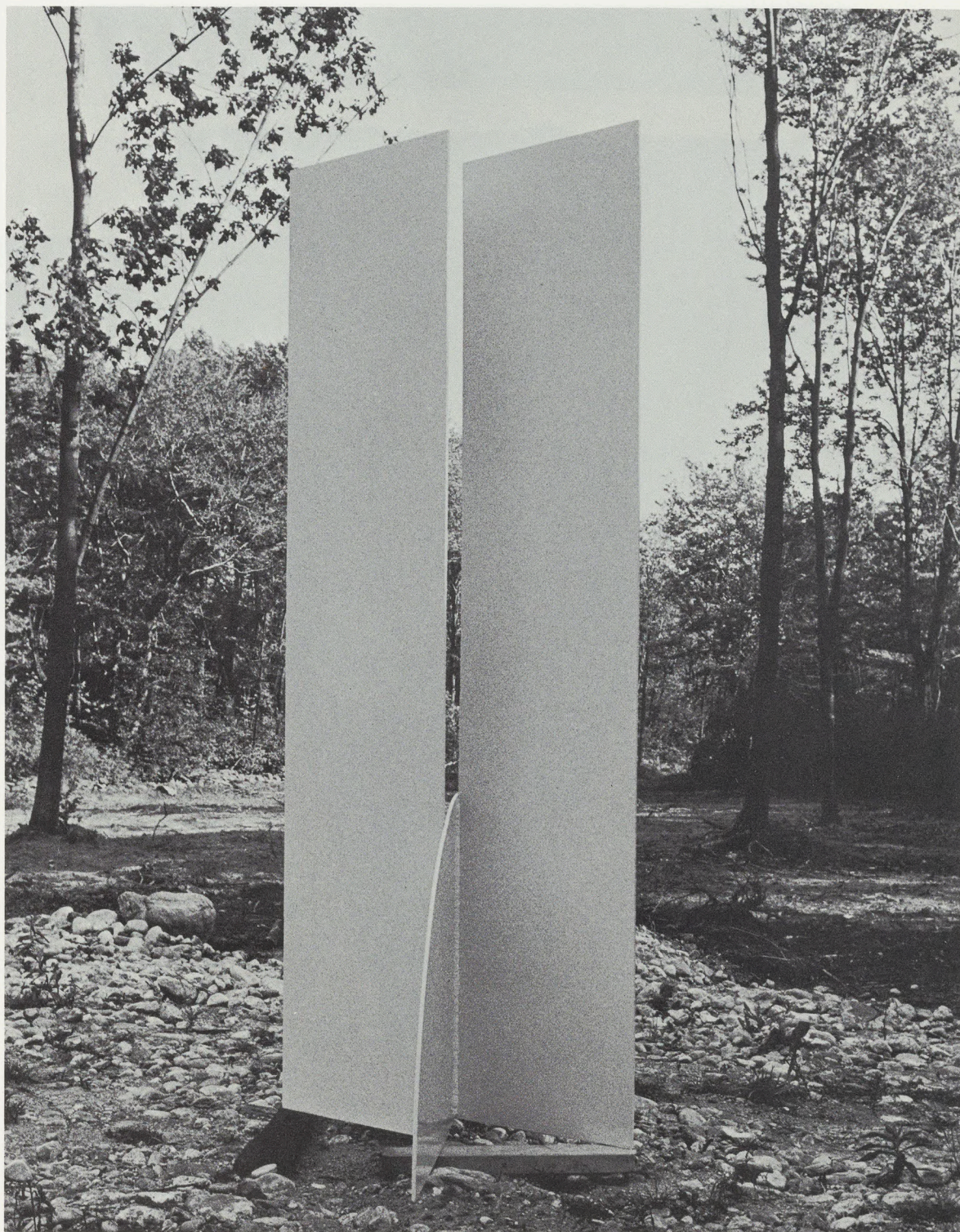




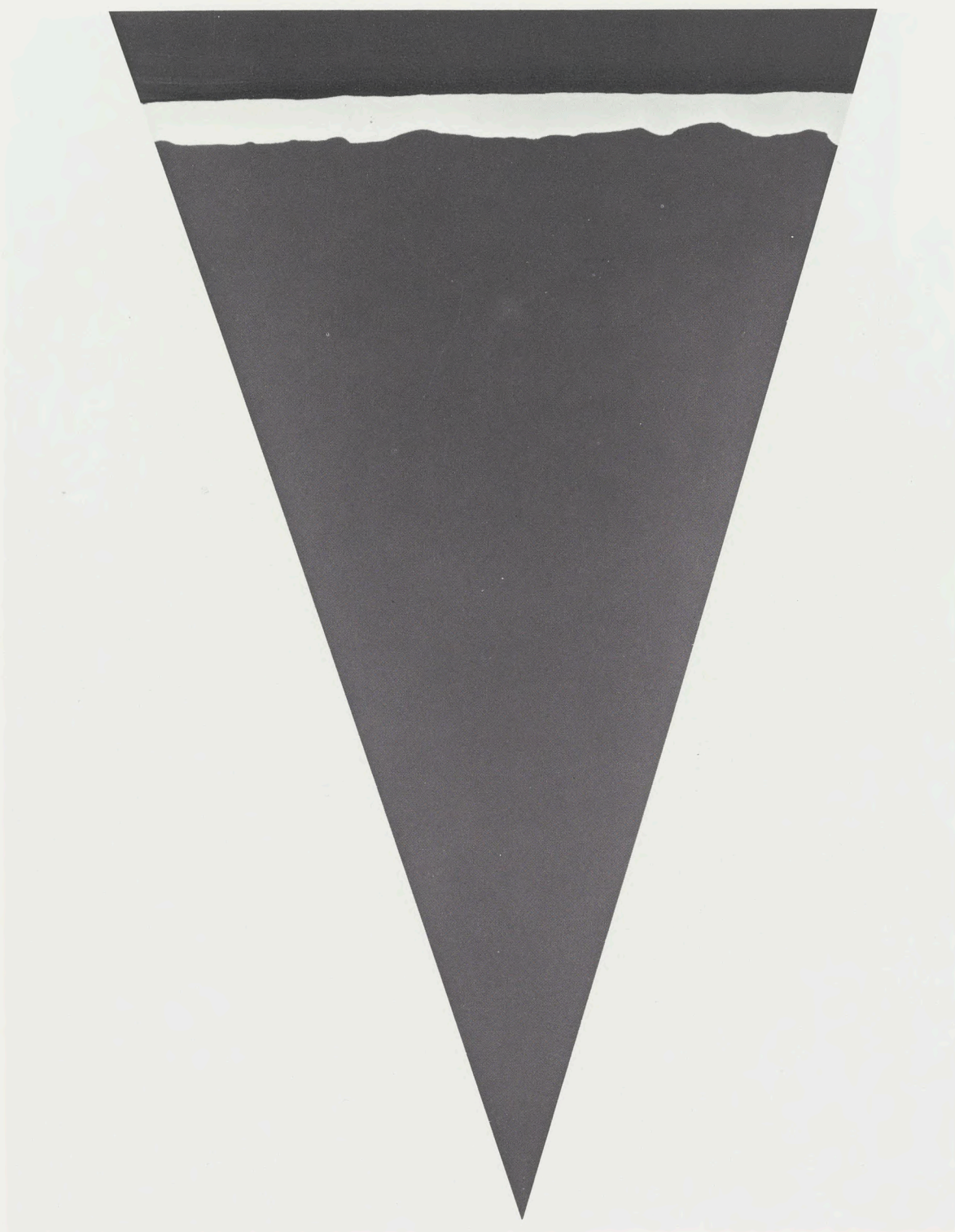
60. GREEN ON LEFT, 1967



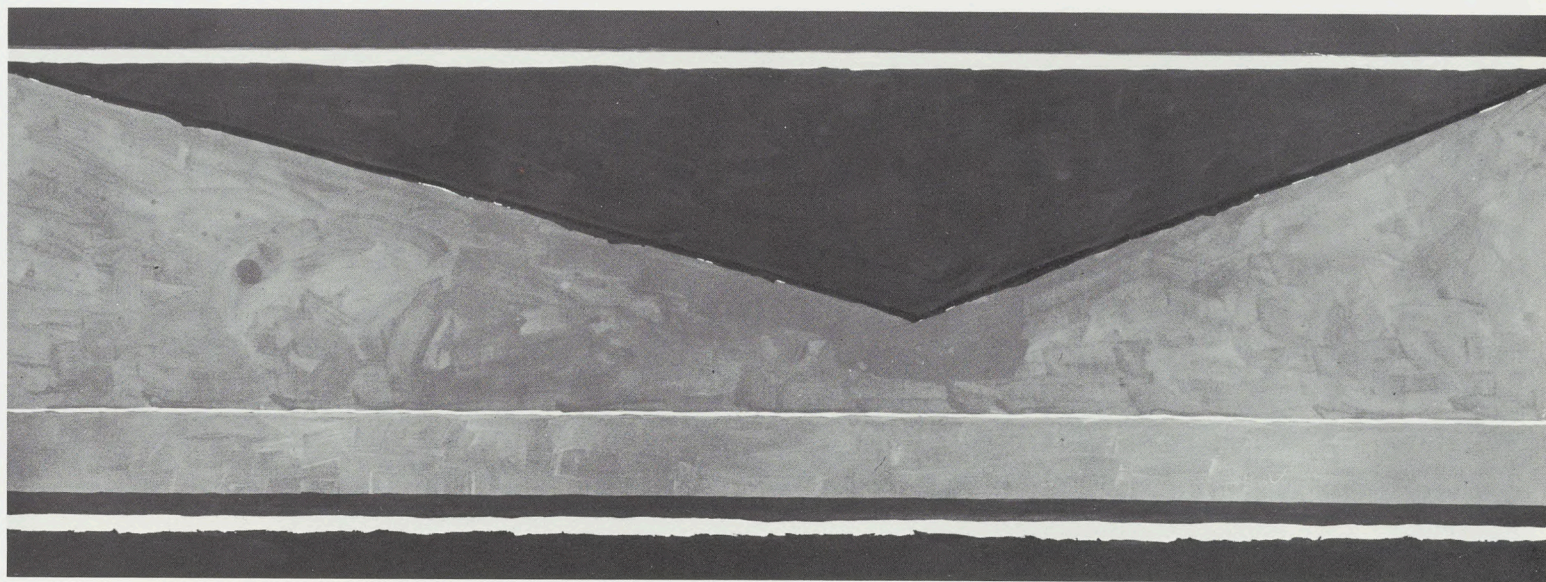
99. KNOT, 1967



103. BETWEEN, 1967



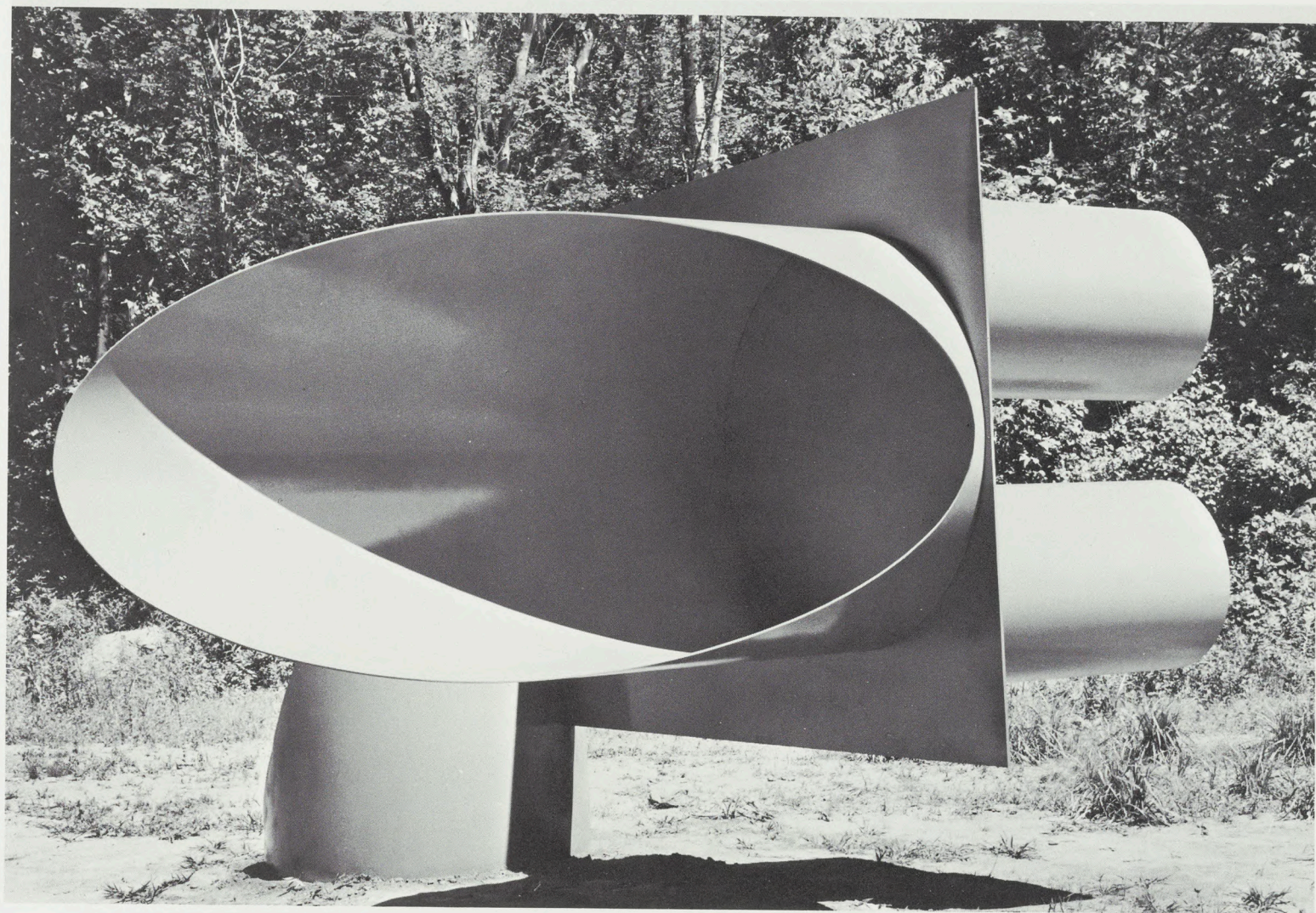
68. VECTOR-BROWN, GREEN HIGH, 1968



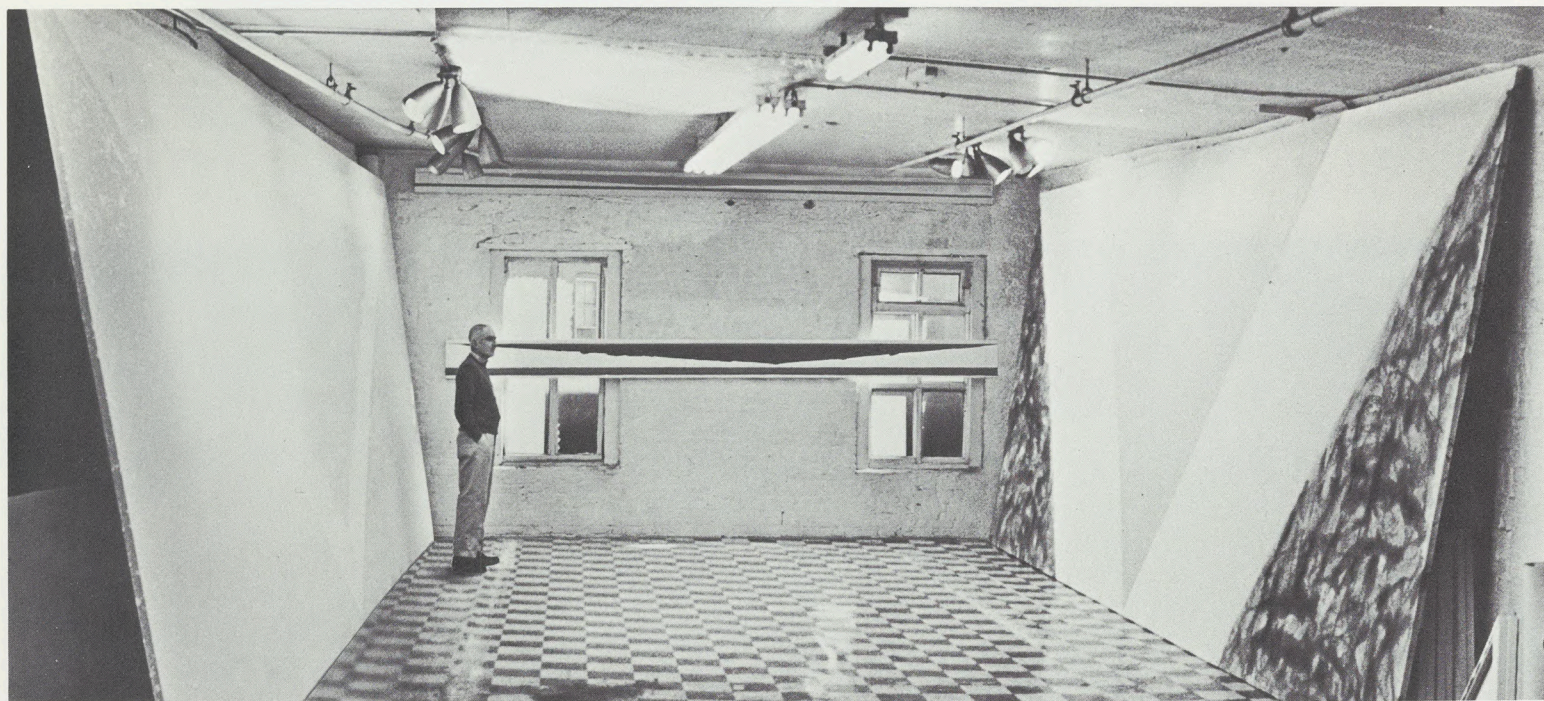
65. UP-BLACK BETWEEN RED, 1968-69



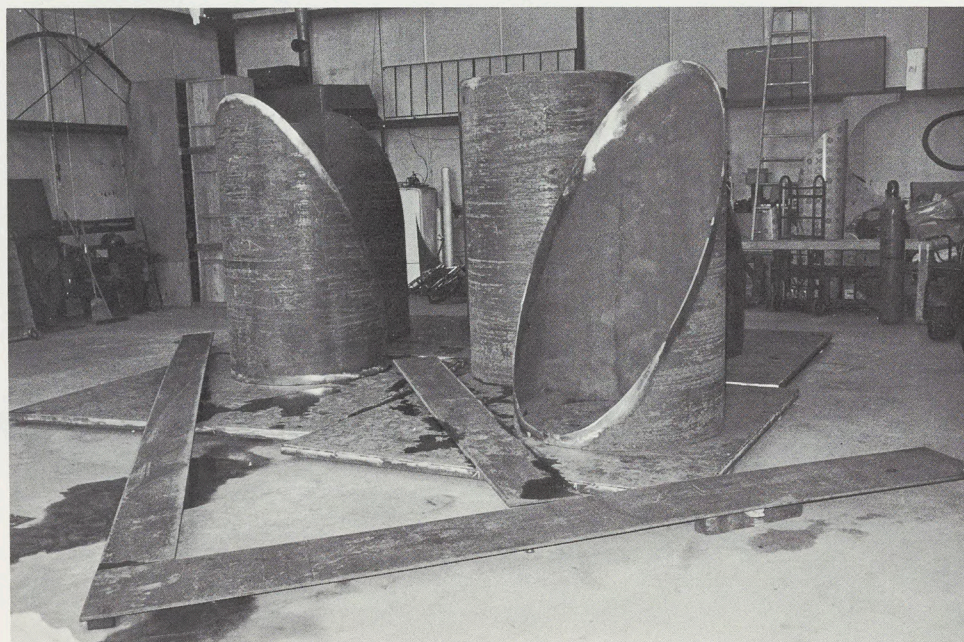
69. VECTOR-YELLOW, RED HIGH, 1969



107. EROS, 1969



72. INVISIBLE ORDER, 1970 (left) and 71. GENESIS, 1970 (right)



111. FIRMAMENT, 1969-70

CATALOGUE

Works have been listed in their chronological order as nearly as possible, taking into consideration that the artist has often engaged himself with a number of works concurrently and on occasion has repainted or altered a work over a period of time.

Dimensions are listed as height preceding width and depth.

Catalogue entries 1-93 indicate works lent by the artist, courtesy of the Betty Parsons Gallery, unless otherwise indicated. Entries 94-113 indicate works lent by the artist, courtesy of the Andre Emmerich Gallery, unless otherwise indicated.

PAINTINGS

1. ONE CIRCLE, 1950
Oil on canvas
40" x 40"
2. TWO CIRCLES, 1950
Enamel on masonite
40" x 40"
3. MINIMUM, 1950
Enamel on masonite
48" x 48"
Collection The Museum of Modern Art, New York
4. DIPTYCH—TWO WAYS, 1950
Enamel on masonite
74½" x 80"
5. DIPTYCH—ONE WAY, 1950
Enamel on masonite
74½" x 80"
6. SIXTEEN WAYS, 1951
Enamel on masonite
50" x 30¾" (x 4)
7. PERPETUAL, 1951
Oil on masonite
40" x 40"
8. CIRCLE PATH, 1952
Oil on canvas
28" x 22"
9. TRAJECTORIES, 1952
Enamel on aluminum
48" x 48"
10. ONE TRAJECTORY, 1952
Enamel on masonite
48" x 48"
11. WHITE DOMINANT, 1952 [repainted 1959]
Oil on canvas
30½" x 50"
Collection Miss Priscilla Peck
12. TIME, 1952
Oil and enamel on masonite
37¼" x 77¼"
13. SYNTHESIS, 1952
Oil and enamel on aluminum
40" x 80"
14. BEAT, 1952
Enamel on aluminum
48" x 48"
15. CIRCUIT, 1952
Oil on masonite
48" x 77¼"
16. EXCHANGE, 1952
Oil and enamel on masonite
30½" x 50"
17. DURATION, 1953
Enamel on aluminum
9½" x 132"
18. AFTER-IMAGE, 1954 [repainted 1959]
Oil on canvas
61¼" x 98¼"
19. ROTATING, 1955-56
Enamel on aluminum
48" x 48"
20. YELLOW—BLACK CENTER, 1957
Oil on canvas
18" x 24"

21. SYSTEMS WITHIN SYSTEMS, 1958
Oil on canvas
24" x 30"
Collection Mr. S. I. Newhouse, Jr.
22. BLUE OPPOSITE RED, 1959
Oil on canvas
40" x 82"
23. SIX HUNDRED AND THIRTY-NINE, 1959
Acrylic and oil on canvas
49¼" x 137"
Collection Mr. S. I. Newhouse, Jr.
24. IOTA III, 1959-60
Oil on canvas
80" x 45"
Collection Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo
Gift of Seymour H. Knox
25. GRAVITATION, 1959-60
Oil on canvas
80" x 96"
Collection Mr. S. I. Newhouse, Jr.
26. CONTINUOUS ON RED, 1960
Oil on canvas
80" tondo
Collection The Museum of Modern Art, New York
27. BETA II, 1961
Oil on canvas
30" x 50"
28. OMEGA III, 1961
Acrylic on canvas
80" x 160"
29. OMEGA IV, 1961
Acrylic on canvas
60" x 37"
Collection Mr. and Mrs. Burton Tremaine
30. OMEGA IX, 1961
Acrylic on canvas
60" x 80"
31. OMEGA XIV, 1961
Acrylic on canvas
37" x 60"
32. OMEGA XV, 1961
Oil on canvas
60" x 80"
33. OMICRON II, 1961 [repainted 1969]
Acrylic on canvas
80" tondo
34. THE GREAT MYSTERIES I, 1962
Acrylic on canvas
111¼" x 80"
35. THE GREAT MYSTERIES III, 1962
Acrylic on canvas
112" x 50"
Collection The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
36. EARTH VIII, 1962
Acrylic on canvas
80" x 60"
37. GREEN RIM, 1963
Acrylic on canvas
80" x 52"
38. FROM RED TO GREEN, 1963
Acrylic on canvas
80" tondo
39. PARMENIDES IV, 1963
Acrylic on canvas
80" tondo
40. INACCESSIBLE, 1963
Acrylic on canvas
82" x 82"
Collection The Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips
Academy, Andover, Mass.
41. YELLOW SPLASH, 1963
Acrylic on canvas
80" tondo
42. FROM GREY TO BLACK, 1963
Acrylic on canvas
115" x 204"
43. FROM GREY TO GREY, 1963
Acrylic on canvas
81½" x 202"
44. RED FADING, 1964
Acrylic on canvas
82" x 165"
45. RAW END, 1963
Acrylic on canvas
102½" x 198½"
46. ORANGE SPLASH, 1963
Acrylic on canvas
82" x 165"

47. FROM BLACK TO WHITE, 1964
Acrylic on canvas
111" x 236"
Collection The Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.
48. BLACK INTO PINK, 1964
Acrylic and enamel on canvas
162" x 116"
49. WITHIN, 1964
Acrylic and enamel on canvas
118" x 33½"
50. UNTITLED, 1964
Acrylic and enamel on canvas
81" x 45½"
51. LIGHT GIVEN, 1965
Acrylic and enamel on canvas
116" x 110"
52. BLACK BLACKER, 1965
Acrylic on canvas
81" x 107½"
53. MONAD, 1966
Acrylic on canvas
90" x 53"
Collection Mr. Bill Blass
54. ASCENSION, 1966
Acrylic on canvas
128" x 81½"
55. TRIAD, 1966
Acrylic and enamel on canvas
100" x 65"
56. COLOR RISING, 1966
Acrylic on canvas
114" x 76"
57. WITHIN BLACK, 1966
Acrylic on canvas
81" x 126"
58. ON HIGH, 1967
Acrylic and enamel on canvas
143" x 40"
59. AURAS, 1967
Acrylic and enamel on canvas
141" x 202"
60. GREEN ON LEFT, 1967
Acrylic on canvas
115" x 118"
61. IS I, 1967
Acrylic on canvas
110" x 80"
62. ORB IX, 1967
Acrylic on canvas
110" x 80"
63. UP-ORANGE ABOVE BLUE, 1968
Acrylic on canvas
81" x 209"
64. UP-ORANGE BETWEEN YELLOW, 1968-69
Acrylic on canvas
81" x 237"
65. UP-BLACK BETWEEN RED, 1968-69
Acrylic on canvas
81" x 218"
66. UP-BLUE BETWEEN VIOLET AND YELLOW, 1968-69
Acrylic on canvas
115" x 228"
67. VECTOR-VIOLET, BLUE BISECTING, 1968
Acrylic on canvas
125" x 125"
68. VECTOR-BROWN, GREEN HIGH, 1968
Acrylic on canvas
95½" x 60"
69. VECTOR-YELLOW, RED HIGH, 1969
Acrylic on canvas
125" x 125"
70. VECTOR RED, 1969
Acrylic on canvas
107" x 180"
71. GENESIS, 1970
Acrylic on canvas
10' x 30'
72. INVISIBLE ORDER, 1970
Acrylic on canvas
10' x 25'
73. UP-RED BETWEEN BROWN AND YELLOW, 1970
[begun 1968]
Acrylic on canvas
81" x 211"

SCULPTURE

74. UNTITLED, 1952
Plaster
42½" x 17¼" x 10½"
75. SPACE, 1952
Plaster
72½" x 18" x 21½"
76. PASSAGE, 1959
Enamel and slate
9" x 6¼" x 5½"
Collection The Museum of Modern Art, New York
77. TIME, 1959
Enamel, gold leaf, and lucite
13½" x 19½" x 6½"
78. UNTITLED, 1959
Steel
96" x 66" x 6"
79. TIME-SPACE, 1960
Enamel on copper
9" x 10" x 6"
Collection Mr. and Mrs. Howard Lipman
80. SIGMA I, 1961
Polished aluminum
102" x 20" x 14"
Collection Mr. and Mrs. Edouard Cournand
81. CLYTEMNESTRA, 1962
Polished aluminum
28¾" x 40" x 13"
82. CIRCLES, 1962
Aluminum
24¾" x 9" x 23"
83. APHRODITE II, 1962
Anodized aluminum
76" x 83" x 20"
84. UNTITLED, 1963
Aluminum
26½" x 19" x 9"
Collection Mr. and Mrs. Barnett Newman
85. NEPTUNE, 1963
Anodized aluminum
89" high
86. WITH BLUE, 1963
Painted steel
22" x 16" x 8"
87. UNTITLED, 1963
Steel
5'9" x 7'4" x 11'6"
88. STRAIGHT THEN CURVED, 1963
Anodized black aluminum
10'6" x 24" x 36"
89. THE BLACK RIDDLE, 1963
Anodized aluminum and chrome
36½" x 14" x 18"
Collection Mr. William Rubin
90. REACHING, 1963
Bronze
11¾" x 14" x 10"
91. PASSAGE, 1963-64
Bronze
7½" x 11½" x 5¾"
92. UNTITLED, 1964
Painted steel
83" x 46" x 44"
93. UNTITLED, 1965
Steel
70" x 61" x 12"
94. RITUAL II, 1966
Painted steel
24' x 56" x 56"
95. REALMS, 1966
Painted steel
6'9" x 10'5" x 10'6"
96. AROUND, 1966
Painted steel
67" x 146" x 65"
97. END FREE V, 1966
Steel
62" x 39" x 70"
98. INTERFERENCE, 1966-67
Painted steel
10'6" x 12'2" x 8'
99. KNOT, 1967
Painted steel
96" x 80"
100. TRACE, 1967
Varnished steel
98" x 72" x 22'7"1.

101. THRICE, 1967
Painted steel
60" x 114" x 72"
102. OFFERING, 1967
Painted steel
10'6" x 19'4" x 19'3"
103. BETWEEN, 1967
Painted steel
90" x 33" x 56½"
104. TILT, 1967
Steel
60" x 78" x 70"
Collection Miss Helen Frankenthaler
105. TORQUE IN SQUARES, 1968
Aluminum
58" x 29" x 36"
106. TROPIC, 1968
Painted steel
17'10" x 20'9½" x 16'8"
Collection Mr. and Mrs. Morton J. Hornick
107. EROS, 1969
Painted steel
91" x 144" x 138"
Collection Mr. and Mrs. Samuel C. Miller
108. ADAM, 1969
Painted steel
28'6" x 29'6" x 24'6"
109. EVE, 1969
Painted steel
16'3" x 44' x 24'8"
110. PATH, 1969-70
Painted steel
94" x 168" x 81"
111. FIRMAMENT, 1969-70
Painted steel
7'4" x 26' x 28' 1.
112. TEMPLE III, 1970 [begun 1964]
Polished aluminum
9'6" x 8' x 8'
Collection Isaac Delgado Museum of Art, New Orleans
113. CHROME VI, 1970
Chrome
9¼" x 18¼" x 13½"

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